

Ontario Government Favours Appearance over Substance in Dealing with Youth Vaping

TORONTO, Feb. 28, 2020 /CNW/ - The Government of Ontario's proposed regulations to restrict the sale of vaping products in convenience stores fail to address the youth vaping crisis. Despite having no evidence to suggest that youth are accessing vape products from convenience stores, the government is discriminating against them while allowing specialty vape shops and online retailers to continue to operate unchecked.

"Convenience stores are regulated, experienced and trusted, yet the government is handing a monopoly to vape shops that have flouted the law for years. In Ontario, we pass mystery shopping tests at a rate of over 96%. In addition, 87% of convenience stores passed *Health Canada* compliance tests while 80% of vape shops **failed**" said Anne Kothawala, President and CEO of the Convenience Industry Council of Canada.

Last week, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) released the "*2019 Drug use Among Ontario Students Report*" which found that convenience stores were '**the least common source of vaping products for youth.**' Borrowing from a friend topped the list (53.7%), buying from a friend or someone else (11.2%), and purchasing from a specialty vape store (9.7%) rounded out the top three sources of vaping products for youth, with convenience stores making up less than 1%. "This report further confirms what we have been saying for months, that convenience stores are not the source of vaping products for youth," continued Kothawala.

"This government promised that it would make evidence-based decisions but are instead favouring appearance over substance which will have no effect on youth vaping," said Kothawala. Studies show that many adults use vaping products to wean themselves off of tobacco products. Kothawala noted that the proposal to reduce nicotine concentrations would force many of these adult vapers back to cigarettes. "Our industry sales data shows that 80 percent of adult smokers who switched from tobacco to a reduced risk product chose a flavoured option with a nicotine concentration that matches that of a cigarette. While we fully support any efforts to combat the increase in youth vaping, restricting the ability of convenience stores to offer the products that our adult customers need to successfully quit smoking is not only misguided, it is dangerous public policy."

"There is still time to implement policies that will work. But until the government addresses online sales and vape shops, the policies that have been proposed will not meet the outcomes that the government is suggesting they will. The convenience industry has a plan that will actually address the issue of youth vaping and we encourage government to work with us to get this right" concluded Kothawala.

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