

Today was **almost** my first day without nicotine in over a year. This has been my fourth attempt to quit using nicotine products, including both electronic cigarettes and combustible cigarettes. I have used reusable vapes, switched to cigarettes to “better control my nicotine intake,” and repeatedly bought disposable vapes to pretend it was my “last one, I swear.” 8 months ago I switched to primarily using nicotine gum, but have been unable to cease the use of this. Despite countless bumps in the road, I remain proud of this progress, as I am surrounded by peers that view quitting vaping/ smoking to be an insurmountable feat. As both a tobacco researcher and an individual that has struggled with nicotine addiction, I have witnessed the trends in young adult smoking up close. More importantly, I have seen and experienced the initiation of youth tobacco use and the consequent hardships to cease use.

I implore Vermonters and Vermont legislators alike to consider the power they have to combat the tobacco industry’s harm to our youth. An additional one million dollars to the VDH’s tobacco control efforts would increase access to cessation programs and education programs. In my 3 semesters of vaping/ smoking research, it became clear that young adults feel that they do not have access to resources, nor the educational background to feel guided in their health-related behavior. Unsure of the impact of smoking on their health, and even more unsure as to if smoking or vaping was worse, the young adult population in Burlington is left to make health-related decisions without being informed. A prominent example is the phenomenon of young adults switching to smoking cigarettes from vaping; young adults often believe vaping will pose greater future harm, despite research showing that combustible cigarettes pose an even greater risk to health than vaping. Education would prevent these harmful smoking trajectories. Furthermore, educational resources could prevent youth use in the first place. The age of onset of tobacco use has decreased, with adolescents as young as middle school age experimenting with flavored vapes.

Additional funding would increase the ability of the Department of Health to combat predatory marketing and sale of flavored vapes and menthol cigarettes. The sole purpose of these products is to attract and facilitate addiction in not only structurally disadvantaged groups in Vermont but our children and young adults as well. Vermonters cannot stand by as the tobacco industry introduces and advertises vapes such as the Loon, which have a 6.5% nicotine content (1.5% higher than the fruit-flavored Juul pods that are now banned) in

adolescent-friendly fruit and candy flavors. Loons are the most commonly used disposable vapes in Burlington and have led to an addiction to nicotine in myself and my peers. I had quit using nicotine for over a year until I tried a Loon for the first time. Now I have gone 1 year and 4 months unable to quit using nicotine, all while watching the same happen in UVM students and younger individuals I am surrounded by in Vermont.

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