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Vaping exclusive: Western sydney students putting a stop to vaping in young people

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The prevention of adolescent vaping has taken a significant leap forward in western Sydney, with the launch of the Breathe Easy All Together (BEAT) program recently.

Spearheaded by Western Sydney Local Health District's (WSLHD) Prevention Education and Research Unit (PERU) in collaboration with the Department of Education and the Eastern Creek Principal Network, BEAT is Australia's first peer-led e-cigarette prevention initiative.

Model Farms High School is at the forefront of this effort. Twenty-eight Year 10 students from the school volunteered, becoming the first cohort to train as BEAT Peer Leaders. This marks a full circle moment for Model Farms which was one of the first schools in western Sydney to acknowledge and address the rising concern of vaping among students.

In response to urgent appeals from schools seeking help to curb the rise of vaping in 2021, PERU embarked on a comprehensive listening phase, engaging with 162 students, 133 school staff, and 29 parents. This deep dive into the community's concerns and needs revealed a strong desire for effective, relatable prevention

Voices
Western Sydney

00:00



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strategies. The insights gathered laid the foundation for the BEAT program, which was piloted in 2023 in four schools.

BEAT is modelled after the evidence-based Triple A program and follows a three-step process designed to empower students to make informed decisions about vaping. Selected Year 10 students first complete an online course that equips them with vital knowledge about e-cigarettes. They then participate in a one-day workshop where they are trained as BEAT Peer Leaders. Finally, these Year 10 students deliver two 60-minute lessons to Year 7 students, passing on their knowledge and fostering a culture supportive of not vaping.



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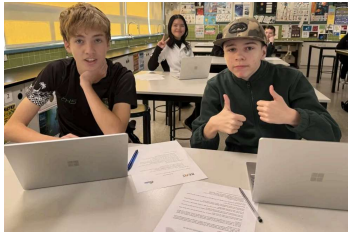
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The impact of the program has already been felt. Rebecca Smith, Deputy Principal of Model Farms High School, noted that the school has “gained a sense of control” in addressing the vaping issue, thanks to their collaboration with PERU. Students echoed this sentiment, reporting increased knowledge, leadership skills, and confidence in addressing vaping within their school community.

“I gained more knowledge on how harmful vapes are and how they can affect people. I learnt how to help and support people or friends who vape to be able to stop or quit,” shared one BEAT Peer Leader.

Another student added, “I gained more confidence in learning. I learnt how badly vaping can harm people and how easily people are influenced.”

Looking ahead, the BEAT program is set to expand its reach, with plans to involve 12 high schools across western Sydney over the next two years. As these young leaders take the reins, there is a renewed hope that they will inspire their peers to make healthier choices and foster a supportive school environment.

Professor Smita Shah, lead investigator for the study said “The success of the BEAT program is a testament to the power of peer influence in tackling the vaping crisis”.

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Directions to the new Westmead Hospital
Emergency Department

As the initiative continues to grow, it promises to make a lasting impact on the health and well-being of students across the region.

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