



## Health advocates seeking to discourage teen use of e-cigs want state funding restored

By Cullen Browder

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**RALEIGH, N.C.** — For years, health advocates used prevention campaigns to stop teen smoking before it starts, but state funding for such efforts was snuffed out just as e-cigarettes started growing in popularity.

From 2011 to 2013, the number of North Carolina high school students who started using electronic cigarettes rose by an estimated 352 percent, according to a study by the state Division of Public Health.

Pam Seamans, executive director of the North Carolina Alliance for Health, said she doesn't think it's a coincidence that the spike came after state lawmakers took away the roughly \$17 million a year from North Carolina's portion of the national tobacco settlement that had been earmarked for smoking cessation and educational programs, many of which were aimed at teens.

"That's a staggering increase. That tells me that there's a lack of understanding, that young people are trying them even though they're not permitted to buy them themselves," Seamans said Monday. "We need to get some education out there to our young people."

The state now funds just \$1.2 million for the QuitLineNC smoking cessation service, but in light of the state budget surplus, Seamans and other health advocates are lobbying the state Senate to include some money for e-cigarette education programs in the 2015-16 budget. The \$22.1 billion spending plan that the state House passed last week didn't include any such funding.

"Electronic cigarettes are marketed to young people by flavoring them with flavors that are enticing to kids, like bubble gum and watermelon," she said.

E-cigarettes use battery-heated coils to vaporize flavored liquids. In addition to a range of flavors, they offer a variety of nicotine levels.

Addison Gagnier of Juice Vapeorium, on Chapel Hill Road in Cary, disagrees that e-cigarette vendors target teens, noting that his store obeys state law in not selling to anyone under age 18.

"Just because it's flavored doesn't mean it's geared towards kids," Gagnier said. "A lot of people come in asking for something that's sweet and fruity."

Still, he admits that he started smoking as a teen and turned to e-cigarettes as a way to quit smoking regular cigarettes.

"E-cigs are definitely a great alternative to smoking," he said. "I don't advocate underage people doing this, but from personal experience, it's hard to stop them. I'm going to do my part to make sure that I keep this stuff away from minors."

Seamans compares the growth in e-cigarette use to the dawn of smoking, hooking people long before definitive health studies showed the deadly risks.

There's not a huge body of research on the long-term health effects of e-cigarettes. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has signaled that it intends to regulate the devices, but so far, the idea is only a proposal.

"It may not be the same as exposure to cigarette smoke and inhaling cigarette smoke, but there's some risk," Seamans said. "So, as long as there's a risk, let's keep it out of the hands of our children."

Read more at <http://www.wral.com/health-advocates-seeking-to-discourage-teen-use-of-e-cigs-want-state-funding-restored/14669218/#VOICxKPIpZxVwcyO.99>