

Background



The Vermont Department of Health Tobacco Control Program has partnered with the Agency of Education since 2016 to support local high school chapters of Our Voices Xposed (OVX) and middle school chapters of Vermont Kids Against Tobacco (VKAT) helping to end tobacco's influence on youth.



Both OVX and VKAT, which may receive funding from local tobacco community coalitions, are based on the Positive Youth Development framework that recognizes the individual strengths of Vermont youth and provides skill building opportunities to prepare young leaders. With the guidance of adult advisors and coalitions, OVX and VKAT youth work to educate and inform their school peers, community members and local and state decision makers on the manipulative and deceptive marketing tactics tobacco and vape companies use to target youth.

What OVX & VKAT Youth Do

- They play meaningful roles in improving the health of their communities.
- They educate on the tobacco and vape industries deceptive advertising and price discounting to hook new customers.
- They deliver the facts about the negative health effects and social consequences of smoking, vaping and nicotine use to increase awareness of and support for tobacco policies designed to protect youth.
- They inform local and state decision makers on tobacco and nicotine related issues, as seen and experienced firsthand.

Why our work matters

- Nicotine is harmful to developing brains; younger users are more likely to become addicted, have more difficulty quitting and may be at higher risk for addiction to other substances in the future.¹
- New and emerging flavored tobacco products that are not FDA-approved are flooding the market and accessible to youth.²
- Youth and young adults perceive flavored tobacco products as more appealing, better tasting and less harmful than non-flavored tobacco products. Flavors, especially sweet and fruit flavors, play a role in influencing tobacco use or experimentation in youth and young adults.³

- Teens who first try tobacco using a vape are four times more likely to try cigarettes, compared to teens who don't vape, and teens who first try tobacco using a vape are three times more likely to be current cigarette smokers within two years.
- Many e-cigarette brands now are marketed with “tobacco-free nicotine” or “synthetic nicotine,” a claim that can imply lower risk and increase purchase intentions among teen users.
- E-cigarettes are often falsely promoted as “reduced risk,” “smoke-free,” “socially acceptable” consumer products.
- During the last 30 days, 16% of Vermont high schoolers have used an e-cigarette product. Of those who vaped, 30% used it every day.
- LGBTQ+ students are significantly more likely than heterosexual/cisgender students to use an e-cigarette during the past 30 days.

“Youth empowerment is about allowing youth a legitimate voice in the system. From meaningful participation by youth in their own litigation, to influencing local and national policy, youth empowerment is about providing for youth’s actual needs, not just adult conceptions of those needs.”

National Association of Counsel of Children

For More Information

For more information on OVX or VKAT, or assistance implementing a chapter in your community, please contact the Vermont Tobacco Control Program at tobaccovt@vermont.gov.



To Learn More

To learn more or to get involved in tobacco prevention in your community, visit Counterbalancevt.com.

¹ Nicotine and The Young Brain: <https://truthinitiative.org/research-resources/harmful-effects-tobacco/nicotine-and-young-brain>

² Flavored Tobacco Use Among Youth and Young Adults: <https://truthinitiative.org/research-resources/emerging-tobacco-products/flavored-tobacco-use-among-youth-and-young-adults>

³ U.S. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS): <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/index.htm>