

## Vaporizing The Future

The unpleasantly sweet scent meets me in the hallways, seeps out of restrooms, and greets me in my best friends' breaths. These "ghosts" haunt me all day, during class, after school, everywhere. It seems as though a vendor selling popcorn, cotton candy, or gummy bears is waiting for me around each corner. A friendly face is never too far away, offering me a hit. I know that giving in to these temptations will have a significant consequence on my future, but how can something so normal be so wrong?

According to Sally Ancheta, a coordinator for the state's Tobacco Free Coalition, 49% of high schoolers and 35% of middle schoolers in Hawai'i have admitted to vaping at least once, and 27% use daily, much higher than the national average of 20%. We do not know the full extent of the effects, but we know that vaping can pose quite a few health risks for both teens and adults. You do not have to be a rocket scientist to understand that putting any foreign chemical into your body may be harmful. Vaping can expose teens to a variety of carcinogens, or substances that may cause cancer. While otherwise considered safe, certain metals and chemicals when heated up by the internal metal coil can become harmful. For example, the metal manganese can become detrimental to the nervous system. Also, the chemicals formaldehyde, acetaldehyde, and benzene, as well as the metals nickel and chromium, become carcinogens. These are all found in the e-cigs and their "juices." Additionally, vaping can be harmful to teens' lungs. It can cause Bronchiolitis Obliterans, commonly known as popcorn lung, which leads to a dry cough, shortness of breath, fevers, aches, and scars on the tissues of their lungs. It is caused by the inhalation of diacetyl, which is a flavoring that is found in many e-cig vapors, and although there are treatment options for this complication, there is no cure. In addition, vaping

can irritate the lungs, causing a chronic cough and sometimes chronic bronchitis, which includes the side effects, wheezing and phlegm. Those with chronic bronchitis often develop permanent lung damage with age. These are only a few of the health problems that people who vape may face.

The truth is, we do not know enough about the long-term effects that vaping can have on the youth of Hawai'i, since it has been available in America for a mere 11 years. It seems dangerous for teens, who have their whole lives ahead of them, to dive headfirst into something so unknown. Based on the information that we have been able to collect, if we do not make a change, 50 years from now, almost everyone will be vaping and battling addiction linked to the nicotine found in e-cig vapors. Even if we have completely discovered and researched the consequences by then, it will have already begun to affect our health, due to the accumulation of up to 50 years vaping.

Finding a solution to this issue will not be easy. Here in Hawai'i, the legal age to buy and use e-cigarettes is 21, but this does not stop teens, as the law is not strictly enforced. This may also be partly due to the fact that the fee for being caught is merely \$10 for the first offense, and \$50 for the subsequent times. We should raise this fee, as well as the punishment for anyone caught selling or introducing e-cigs to a minor. In addition, we need to "crack down" on the issue, increasing surveillance. Another possible solution to this problem is to limit, if not completely eliminate, the flavor options of the e-cig "juice." This is perhaps the most appealing part of vaping for teens. Taking away this flavoring and exposing the unpleasant taste of tobacco may turn away many of these young customers. Additionally, if we educate our children about the effects of vaping, and if we raise awareness of the health issues that it can cause, this may

help to discourage teens. We can do this by advertising more on social media sites such as Instagram or YouTube, and replacing vaping propaganda with anti-vape ads.

Clarence T.C. Ching, a perfect model of philanthropy, generosity, and selflessness, inspires me to help my fellow teens combat their addiction. He cared deeply for the keiki of Hawai'i, so I know that he would want to help them succeed. In helping to create buildings for students across Hawai'i, his foundation has provided safe spaces for students to explore not only the world around them, but also themselves. This is why it is difficult for me to see these same exact buildings being filled with smoke. I want to make a difference, even though it will be small when compared with the greatness that Mr. Ching has accomplished.

Today is the day that we must strive to make a difference. Now is the time to act. If we start now, we can create a better future, for us, for our children, for our children's children. By addressing this issue now, we can prevent chronic diseases, addiction, cancer, and for some, even death. If we work to eradicate vaping today, we will pave the way for a brighter, and healthier tomorrow.

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