



November 2021

The Expand Project Launch: Smoking Cessation for Queer and Trans Young Adults

Overview

The Ontario Tobacco Research Unit (OTRU), together with the Canadian Cancer Society (CCS), is launching The Expand Project: a research initiative and social marketing campaign to address smoking and vaping among queer and trans young adults. The project is funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada and is being piloted in three cities: Toronto, Thunder Bay and Montreal.

The Expand Project is launching in December 2021 after extensive input by queer and trans young adults, an advisory committee, and collaborative working groups with representation from across each pilot city.

The lead partner agencies collaborating with and guiding OTRU on the project are: The 519 in Toronto, NorWest Community Health Centres in Thunder Bay and the LGBTQ+ Community Centre in Montreal.

Project Goals

The Expand Project team is hoping to broaden current conversations around smoking (and vaping) among queer and trans young adults between the ages of 18 and 29. The goal is to share accurate information and resources encouraging young adults to reflect on smoking both personally and as a larger community, and to support cessation efforts for those ready make a quit attempt.

Preliminary Findings

- Queer and trans young adults face additional stressors and often use smoking and vaping as a coping mechanism to fitting in and dealing with stress, stigma
- Smoking rates differ across different LGBTQI2S+ communities
- Young adult smokers are interested in tailored cessation services that are culturally competent and address broader concerns including mental health

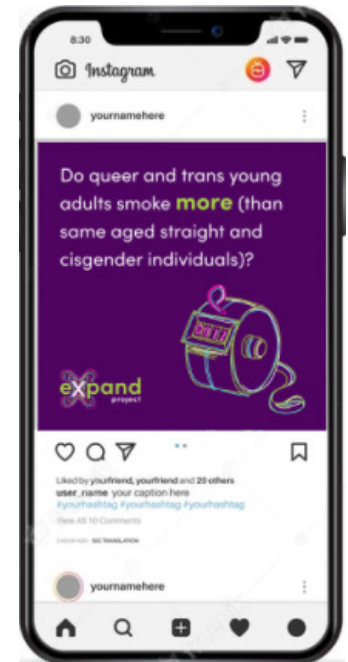


Social Media Presence

The project will promote information and stories of and by queer and trans young adults through social media channels: Instagram, TikTok and Facebook. The team and young adult contributors will be producing original content with a culturally competent, non-judgment approach that allows for questions and answers about smoking and vaping.

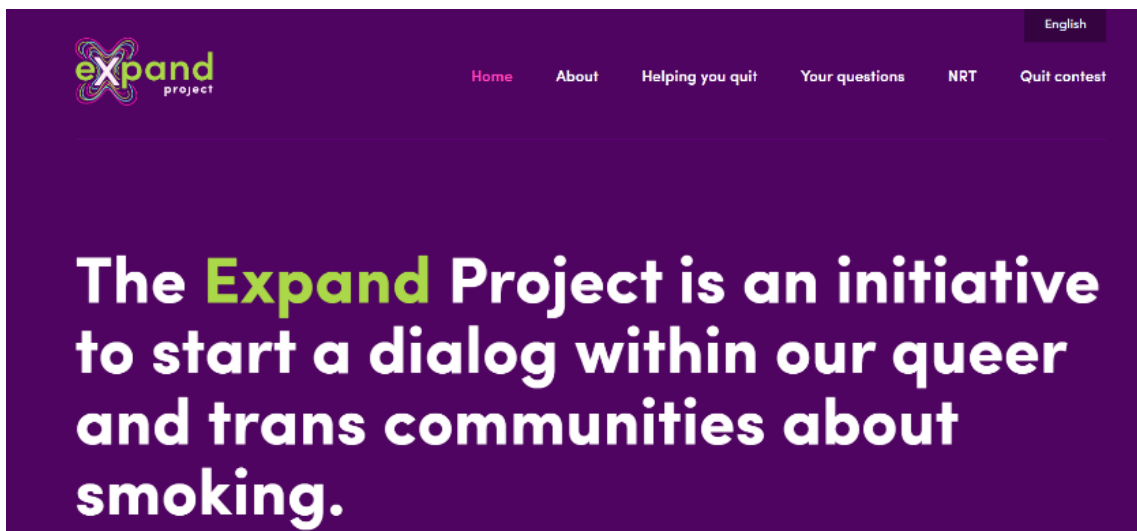
Experiential Events

When COVID-19 infection rates safely allow for it, local events in Toronto, Thunder Bay and Montreal will be identified to promote the campaign. Opportunities will include PRIDE events, film festivals, concerts, etc. Materials developed for the events will include branded event assets and giveaways that drive people to the project website and social media channels.



Project Website

The Expand Project website provides a platform to continue the conversation on smoking in terms of burden of smoking in queer and trans communities; the relationship between stress and smoking; and increasing intentions to quit smoking. The website serves as the hub for those looking for more information and resources including free nicotine replacement therapy (NRT), quitting resources, and access to a quarterly quit contest.





Free NRT

The website will contain an NRT sign-up form for those interested in receiving a free two-week trial pack of either the patch, mist, lozenge or gum. Individuals looking for additional NRT are directed to CAMH's STOP on the Net for more resources.

Research Results

Since the outset of the project, the research team has interviewed 10 key informants (including researchers and program leads from Canada, the U.S., and Australia), conducted 20 focus groups and administered a baseline longitudinal online survey with 1511 respondents.

Qualitative Results

Focus groups conducted in English and French produced a rich amount of information for the project team to apply to the development of the campaign and to furthering the research evidence base on smoking among queer and trans young adults.

Focus groups participants shared their experiences with how smoking and vaping is connected with mental health, fitting in, socializing and coping mechanisms. Smoking was discussed in the context of being a symptom of broader issues faced by queer and trans young adults. They also talked about how positive, empowering campaign messaging resonated with them and that services for this project would need to be culturally competent, supportive and multi-layered to meet the needs of diverse communities in each of the cities.

"I felt strange making friends, I felt strange about my sexuality. It was, smoking was something that it's like okay, well I had this one common factor with these other people, and we can kind of jive on that. I think that that was how it helped me like when I was in high school at least with my sexuality. I think that that was something that I wasn't quite aware of but like looking back on it that makes sense to me that it was just that like form of acceptance especially when I couldn't find that form of acceptance outside of that." – Focus Group Participant (Toronto)



Quantitative Results

In the sample of over 1500 survey respondents, approximately 62% reported that they ever smoked in their life with 34% currently smoking. Of the current smokers, 23% smoked daily and 35% occasionally. In terms of vaping, 60% of the sample have ever vaped and 28% currently vape. Smoking rates were higher among those who identified as non-binary compared to those who identified as women or men. Those who identified as gay, pansexual, and queer had higher smoking rates compared to those who identified themselves with orientations. Smoking rates was higher among older survey participants and vaping rates were higher among younger participants.

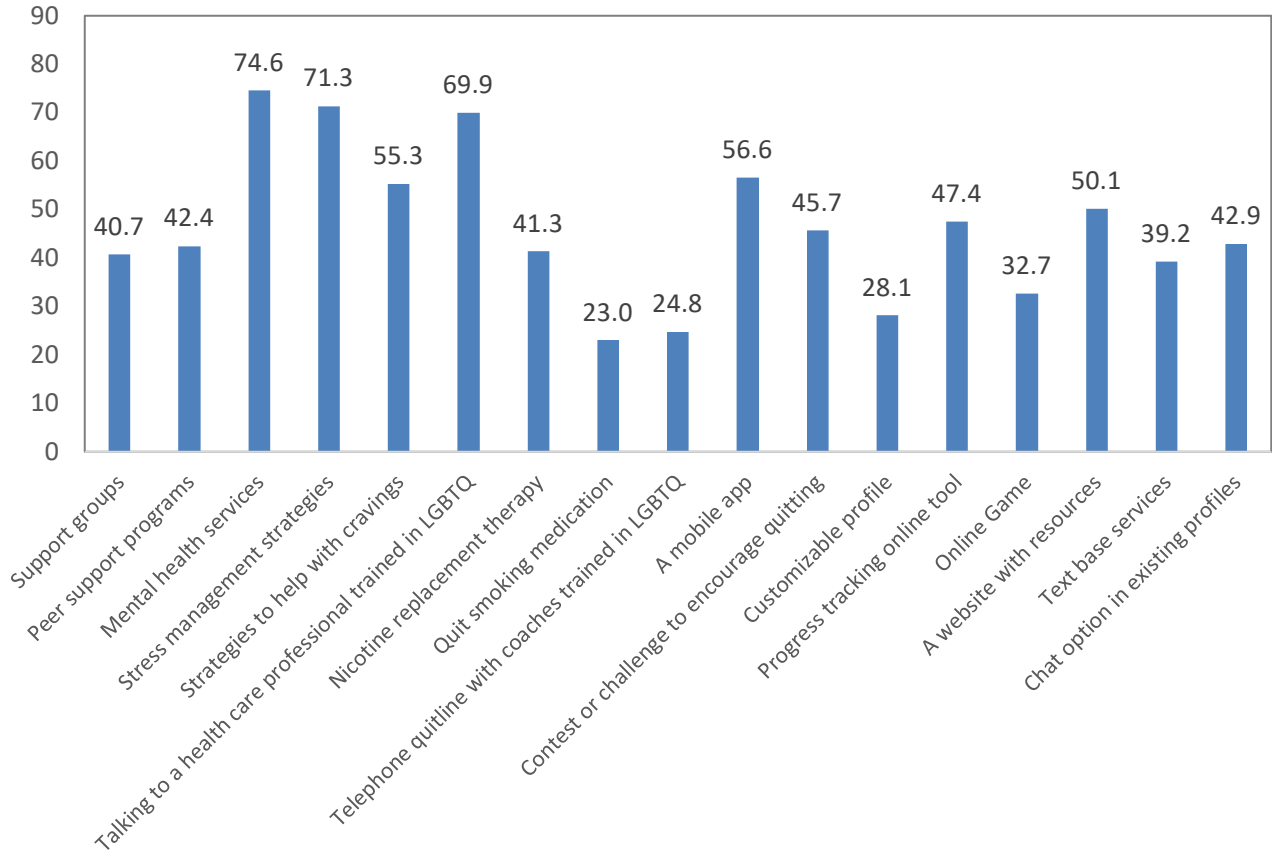
Because of insights gleaned from the focus groups, the research team asked questions about mental health in the online survey. Over two thirds of respondents (69%) reported that they felt their current mental health was either poor or fair and similarly, 62% felt that most days were extremely or very stressful. Due to the cross-sectional nature of the data, we can't infer any causation with smoking but rather show an association of increased self-reported stress among those who smoke and vape.

When asked about what types of cessation services respondents would be interested in (assuming they were tailored and affirming to queer and trans young adults), approximately three-quarters (75%) were interested in mental health services, stress management strategies (72%), talking to a health care professional (70%) (see Table 1).



PROJECT NEWS

Table 1: Interest in Cessation Services if Tailored to the Needs of Queer and Trans Young Adults (n=900 – ever-smokers)



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