



Swap-to-Stop: local delivery for local benefit

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Introduction

The national Swap-to-Stop scheme was a pioneering government plan to **encourage people in England to switch from smoking to vaping by providing free nicotine vape starter kits**, alongside some form of behavioural support.

The popular national Swap-to-Stop scheme has now been consolidated into the public grant.

This means that the organisation and delivery of Swap-to-Stop, or whatever title local authorities wish to use, is now a local responsibility and opportunity.

The national Swap-to-Stop scheme was all about partnerships and this should continue. The new funding arrangement means that the NHS is a loss as there will be a smaller footprint – therefore it is more important than ever that local authorities seek partnerships, especially with the NHS and those organisations that they have worked with previously.

This briefing is primarily intended for commissioners and tobacco leads. It complements the NCSCT Swap-to-Stop online training module and summarises the main components and benefits of Swap-to-Stop.

Who can deliver Swap-to-Stop?

Swap-to-Stop can be delivered in a variety of settings, **reaching some of those who would not regularly engage with health services, let alone seek support for stopping smoking.**

While Local Stop Smoking Services continue to deliver structured behavioural support in line with the NCSCT Standard Treatment Programme, they can also deliver Swap-to-Stop. Many other frontline staff in organisations that regularly give advice and support to people who smoke are in a position to deliver Swap-to-Stop on behalf of local authorities.

How do we supply nicotine vapes?

You can choose to supply nicotine vape starter kits directly, or give out voucher codes for online supply or vouchers for local vape shops.

If you choose to **supply nicotine vapes directly**, you need to consider whether you have enough space to store sufficient vapes and a good range of strengths and flavours of e-liquid. You can choose to either purchase vapes from Unite, the Crown Commercial Service platform that supplies vapes, where many issues of governance and quality-checking have already been undertaken for you, or you can arrange purchasing independently with a supplier of your choice.

You may find that you have a considerable stock of voucher codes from when you were engaged in the national Swap-to-Stop scheme, and these can still be issued. You will issue voucher codes from your existing supply just as you did before the national scheme transferred to the local authorities. You can buy additional codes from Unite.

If your service chooses to redeem these and issue voucher codes so that **clients can obtain nicotine vape starter kits** (and possibly further supplies) **from an online supplier**, you will need to consider whether your service users are likely to use an online ordering system.

If your service chooses to issue voucher codes so that clients can go to a local vape shop to get nicotine vape starter kits (and possibly further supplies), you will need to consider whether your service users are able to travel. You will need to discuss arrangements with your local supplier, who may be able to provide a postal service to clients who are unable to get to the retailer.

You may also want to consider using a national supplier of all stop smoking aids, who would include nicotine vapes in the range of aids that can be supplied. More information on this route and all the other routes to supply can be discussed by contacting enquiries@ncsct.co.uk.

What does it take to do it?

Swap-to-Stop is a light-touch, encouraging and innovative way of raising the subject of smoking with people who may have never considered themselves ready for stopping. **It does not require any specialist skills apart from an ability to talk to people in a way that opens up a conversation, and this is what happens every day between frontline staff and clients, service users and patients in many settings.** It does require some knowledge of the part nicotine vapes can play in stopping smoking, which can be learned through the NCSCT Swap-to-Stop online training module.

Where can Swap-to-Stop be implemented?

Some of the ideal places for delivering Swap-to-Stop are housing associations, mental health outreach services, substance use services, debt management services, LGBTQI+ support and in fact **anywhere that is used by people who may smoke.**

Why should people swap smoking for vaping?

Low risk

Although not risk free, vaping poses only a small fraction of the risks of smoking. This is because there is no combustion with nicotine vapes and the vapour produced does not contain the harmful chemicals in cigarette smoke that cause respiratory disease, heart disease and cancer. **Anyone who makes a complete switch from smoking to vaping is making a change that results in immediate health benefits.**

The pleasure principle

People who smoke and switch to vaping report that one of the key features that make nicotine vapes more desirable than licensed stop smoking aids is that they are pleasurable to use. Any side-effects – like a dry throat and a tickly cough – can be dealt with by drinking water. Side-effects from NRT and prescription-only medications are well known, sometimes challenging to tolerate, and can cause non-compliance with treatment. **People who switch to vaping often report how tolerable they found it, and how surprised they were at the ease with which they stopped smoking.**

The usefulness of nicotine

This route to stopping smoking sometimes worries both users and healthcare workers. There is a common expectation that stopping should be hard and making it easier means that you're cheating somehow. People also worry about 'swapping one addiction for another', which is not the case as we are talking about the same substance, nicotine. It should be noted that **it's not the nicotine in cigarettes that kills, it's the smoke, and that we've been successfully treating smoking with nicotine products for decades.**

Do people mind being asked?

You might imagine that service users will object to being asked about their smoking, but experience shows us that **people expect to be asked, and often welcome the opportunity to talk about their smoking, especially if there is the offer of a free nicotine vape.** Although there is much misinformation about vaping, both among the general public and the health and social care workforce, many people who smoke are desperate for something that will work for them. You could describe them as 'vape-curious', and it often takes very little encouragement to get them to try a nicotine vape.

What about staff who themselves smoke?

Staff who smoke are sometimes understandably nervous about talking to service users about smoking, because they fear that they'll be seen as hypocritical. However, **helping someone else to think about stopping smoking is totally in keeping with the need to consider the health and wellbeing of people who use the service they've come to.** Besides, this intervention, once learned, both draws on and adds to workers' communication skills.

How should it be done?

The NCSCT Swap-to-Stop online training module (see **Training and resources** below) explains how to raise the subject and how to manage the conversation, depending on whether the person is interested, not interested or uncertain about the scheme. **There's no one-size-fits-all when it comes to helping people stop smoking!**

Conclusion

When it was launched, the national Swap-to-Stop scheme was a radical and innovative offer that had significant potential to save lives. Experience has shown that getting your local scheme going in some form, showing success, working with the willing and adapting as you go along will get nicotine vapes into the hands of people who need to stop smoking.

Research from the National Institute of Health and Care Research (NIHR) Policy Research Unit in Addictions at King's College London and University College London has found that Swap-to-Stop results in a significant increase in the number of people using vapes to help quit cigarette smoking.

Swap-to-Stop is also a means of involving people from the community, voluntary sector, homelessness, substance use and mental health workforces to work together with Stop Smoking Services. This especially benefits people who smoke but who may not have considered that Local Stop Smoking Services were for 'people like them.'

Swap-to-Stop will save lives

"It's great news that around 125,000 people in England tried to quit smoking using vapes after the Swap-to-Stop scheme was introduced. People who use vapes are about 50% more likely to quit smoking successfully than those who use nicotine replacement therapy, and quitting smoking substantially reduces the risk of many serious diseases."

Dr Vera Buss, Senior Research Fellow in Behavioural Science at University College London

Training and resources

Online training

Swap-to-Stop online module

https://elearning.ncsct.co.uk/swap_to_stop-launch

Vaping: a guide for healthcare professionals

<https://elearning.ncsct.co.uk/vaping-launch>

Briefings and guidance

Swap-to-Stop resources

www.ncsct.co.uk/publications/swap-to-stop

Vaping: a guide for health and social care professionals

www.ncsct.co.uk/publications/vaping_briefing

Supporting clients who want to stop vaping

www.ncsct.co.uk/publications/support_stop_vaping

Support and treatment for dependence on nicotine vapes

www.ncsct.co.uk/publications/support-treatment-dependence-vapes

Unite procurement platform

More information on the Unite procurement platform is available here

<https://unite.eu/en-gb/support/my-account-with-mercateo>

