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Teenage vaping has 'turned a corner' in Australia, says Mark Butler, as data shows falling rates

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New data suggests teenage vaping rates in Australia are dropping, with Health Minister Mark Butler attributing the decline to strict regulations, though critics argue the Labor government's policies have fueled a dangerous black market. The shift raises questions about enforcement and the long-term impact on youth health.

Recent statistics from the South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI) show a significant reduction in vaping among young Australians in 2024. Vaping rates for 15- to 29-year-olds fell by about a third compared to 2023, while the 30- to 59-year-old group saw a 50% drop. Among high school students aged 14-17, rates declined from 17.5% in early 2023 to 14.6% by April 2024, according to a Health Department report. Butler, speaking to The Guardian, claimed these figures show Australia's vaping laws are "starting to have an effect". The Therapeutic Goods and Other Legislation Amendment (Vaping Reforms) Act 2024, effective from July 2024, restricts vape sales to pharmacies, bans non-therapeutic vape imports, and imposes hefty fines—up to \$2.2 million—for illegal sales. South Australian school suspensions for vaping also dropped 50%, from 388 in Term 1 of 2023 to 186 in 2024.

Despite these claims, the Labor government's approach has drawn sharp criticism. Shadow Health Minister Anne Ruston told ABC News, "Kids are still being targeted by a thriving and dangerous black market". The Coalition argues that high cigarette taxes and restrictive vape laws have pushed users toward unregulated products, with 14% of tobacco consumed in Australia now from illicit sources. Unregulated vapes, often containing harmful chemicals, pose significant health risks. Critics also point to enforcement gaps, with Butler admitting to Insiders that some retailers continue illegal sales despite the ban. The Australian Border Force (ABF) has seized over 5.2 million vapes since July 2024, yet black-market activity persists.

While declining vaping rates are encouraging, the rise of illegal trade underscores the need for stronger enforcement and education. Programs like OurFutures, rolled out to 3,000 schools, aim to educate youth, but the

government must address the black market to truly protect young Australians from nicotine addiction.