



RESEARCH COALITION

Virginia Youth Tobacco Projects Research Coalition

This is the second edition of the Virginia Youth Tobacco Projects (VYTP) Research Coalition newsletter. In each issue, you can look forward to updates related to youth tobacco prevention including upcoming events, funding and collaboration opportunities, ongoing initiatives, and spotlights on our members and grantees.

If you would like to contribute content to a future newsletter, please reach out to us at vytp@vcu.edu.

If you would like to stop receiving these emails, please click 'unsubscribe' at the bottom of the email.

[Visit our Website](#)

VYTP Research Coalition Meeting

We are very grateful to everyone who participated in our last Research Coalition meeting on February 20, 2026. A total of 63 attendees registered for the meeting. To our keynote presenters from [Y Street](#), and to our other speakers—including our grantees, student presenters, and button-creator extraordinaire ([Awareness Flare](#)), we thank you for the time and energy you put into both the preparation and execution of our event. You can read more about the impact of VFHY-funded grants in our [impact report](#).

Upcoming Events

Eliminate Tobacco Use Virginia Summit 2026

Join the Annual Eliminate Tobacco Use Virginia Summit on **Monday, April 20, 2026** via Zoom.

[Register](#) now!

This year's theme is cross-sector collaboration in tobacco control which emphasizes partnership and collective efforts to build healthier, tobacco-free communities across Virginia.

View the agenda [here](#).



Maintaining Momentum -
[Applying the ETU Strategic Framework](#)

Champions for Youth Summit

Join the Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth (VFHY) and Prevention Connections (PC) at the third Champions for Youth Summit on **May 4 – 6, 2026** in Reston, VA.

Buy your [tickets](#) now!

Attendees will explore innovative strategies and best practices addressing critical issues such as tobacco and nicotine use, substance use, childhood obesity, and other intersecting youth health challenges.



Champions for Youth Summit 2026

- Monday, May 4 – Wednesday, May 6, 2026
- Hyatt Regency at Reston Town Center
- Early Bird Pricing Available

Virginia Conference on Youth Tobacco Use

You are invited to attend the Virginia Conference on Youth Tobacco Use, taking place **April 27- 28, 2027**, in Richmond, VA.

Details about registration, poster submissions, and other conference information will be announced soon.

To receive early alerts and discounted registration, sign up [here](#).

We look forward to welcoming you and appreciate your participation in this event!



The Virginia Conference on Youth Tobacco Use

APR 27-28
2027

Sponsored by the Virginia
Youth Tobacco Projects
Research Coalition

Delta Hotels,
Richmond VA



VFHY/VYTP Grantee Spotlight

Darlene Brunzell

How has being a part of the VYTP Research Coalition shaped your research program? One of my very first grants as a new VCU assistant professor was from VYTP! The coalition's multidisciplinary focus is forward-thinking and comprehensive in approach. Where studies in teens and the environmental impacts on their tobacco use have strong external validity, basic science studies can provide rigor and control in exploring relevant biological aspects of youth tobacco exposure; all are applicable to policies that impact the health and well-being of our current youth and future adults. Scientific progress can be slow and incremental. VYTP encouraged me to design experiments with more immediate real-world implications. This has been rewarding for me as an investigator who is motivated to make a difference in public health.



Can you explain the focus of your research? A major focus of my research is to unravel how diverse subtypes of receptors that bind nicotine affect behavioral health. Our work has demonstrated that some of these receptor subtypes support nicotine self-administration (equivalent to vaping or smoking) while other subtypes support nicotine satiety (a signal that "I have had enough"), acting like

an off-switch for tobacco use. Former studies have demonstrated that menthol reduces the function of nicotinic off-switch type receptors and we think this could be why people who use menthol ingest more nicotine. I am excited to begin work on a newly-awarded VYTP small grant that is enabling us to take this research in a new direction, to determine if menthol-associated changes in nicotinic receptor function might also affect alcohol intake. Teens who experiment with nicotine drink more alcohol than teens who do not. Next to tobacco use, alcohol causes more premature deaths than any other drug worldwide, including opioids. These biological data could be impactful to instigate change in policies on menthol, which is presently the only flavor that is legally allowed in tobacco products.

What is a hidden gem or place that you enjoy visiting in Virginia? I love Virginia's diversity of food, culture and environmental beauty! Perhaps that is why, as of this year, I have lived in Virginia longer than any place else (including my hometown in midwestern Wisconsin!). The festivals, cities, history, trails, rivers, bay, mountains and beaches all have so much to offer...right here in our own backyard. If I were to divulge a gem that is hidden in plain sight, I would encourage people to attend the annual Richmond Folk Festival. Located in the outdoor spaces along the James River, it is a free festival that celebrates US and world culture through music and dance. I look forward to it like a holiday every Fall! Every year I see or hear something that is inspiring and unforgettable.

Ongoing Initiatives and Research

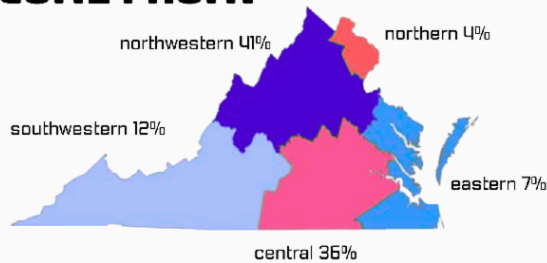
The Confiscated Vapes Spring 2026 Bulletin is Available (in [English](#) and [Spanish](#)).

The VCU Team is [collecting confiscated vaping materials](#) from local schools. They are testing these materials for adulterants in an effort to get a better idea of the dangers present in these products. If you are interested in participating contact Dr. Cobb at cobbco@vcu.edu and she will help to facilitate the collection. If you are looking for more information about the project and educational resources, click [here](#).

DO YOU KNOW WHAT'S IN YOUR VAPE?

During the 2024–2025 school year, researchers at the VCU Center for the Study of Tobacco Products analyzed 1,287 confiscated vaping products submitted by schools across Virginia.

WHERE DID THESE VAPES COME FROM?



14% advertised as **cannabinoid vapes**

83% advertised as **nicotine vapes**

15% contained **THC analogs**

Most of these THC products were highly concentrated. This may lead to:

- *paranoia*
- *psychosis*
- *delusions*
- *seizures*
- *hallucinations*

+ 99% WERE NOT FDA APPROVED
& MANY PRODUCTS WERE INACCURATELY LABELED

What ARE in These Vapes?

Nicotine concentrations were found to be 2x the amount listed in some cases. This can lead to **nicotine toxicity**.



Some vapes contained yeast, mold, and bacteria!



REDUCE YOUR USE!



What Can Quitting do for **YOU?**



Quitting Can Help Improve Heart, Brain, & Lung Function.

Well, What Should I Do **Instead?**

Healthy Substitutes:

- Volunteering
- Clubs
- Music/Art
- Sports



HELPFUL RESOURCES:

Interested in quitting tobacco products?

Quit Now Virginia is a free, confidential, 24/7 service that will help Virginians 13 years and older quit tobacco and nicotine. Visit [QuitNowVirginia.org](https://www.QuitNowVirginia.org) or text **READY** to **34191**.

YMCA of Greater Richmond

The YMCA offers volunteer and leadership opportunities, along with social events! Learn more at <https://www.ymcarichmond.org/programs/teens/>

events. Learn more at <https://www.henricoschools.us/page/student-support-and-wellness>

HCPS Student Support and Wellness

Henrico County Public Schools offer teletherapy for high school students, as well as other counseling and health services. Visit <https://www.henricoschools.us/page/student-support-and-wellness> for more information.

Chesterfield Mental Health Services

Chesterfield County offers substance use and mental health services for youth. Visit <https://www.chesterfield.gov/899/Child-and-Adolescent-Services> for more information.

MADE IN COLLABORATION NOVEMBER 2025

Tools and Resources

Our grantees at Old Dominion University (ODU) have developed a tool called "Avert" which delivers evidence-based information and practical resources to teens, families, and healthcare providers about vaping. To learn more, [click here](#).

← AVERT **Assessing Vaping Exposure Risk for Teens (AVERT): A Resource Linkage Tool** Home About Resources Contact

Connecting professionals to risk based assessment and resources for vaping prevention and cessation for teens.

Find Tailored Resources for Teens

Take the Self Assessment for Teens

About the Tool

With this resource, medical and education professionals, along with parents, will be able to assess teens' levels of risk for vaping use and addiction. The assessment will connect them with evidence-based resources for teen vaping prevention and intervention based on level of risk.

This tool was developed with input from local experts and community members from in and around the Eastern Virginia region.

The Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth (VFHY) recently developed an extensive [list of resources](#) that provide prevention- and cessation-related resources about tobacco and nicotine.

WINTER 2026


Tobacco/Nicotine Prevention and Cessation Resources



This curated list is intended for educators, school administrators, prevention professionals, and community partners seeking educational resources for tobacco and nicotine prevention and youth cessation.

Help with Recruitment - Share these Flyers!

Recruiting Teens and parents!

Help us learn about social experiences and healthy decision making in teens with difficulties focusing 

SCAN ME



Or, go to
redcap.link/buddy

WHAT'S INVOLVED?

- 2 online questionnaires (now & in 3 months)
- Eligible participants can also be invited for additional virtual or in-person opportunities

WHO CAN PARTICIPATE?

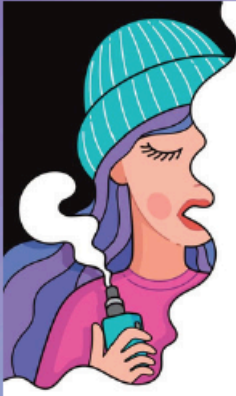
- Teens (age 14-18) with difficulty focusing/concentrating and their caregiver (age 18+)
- Speaks English

COMPENSATION

- Teens: \$25 for each questionnaire + \$10 on-time bonus (\$60 total)
- Caregivers: \$25 for one questionnaire
- Additional paid opportunities for eligible participants

 teenlab@vt.edu  540-231-2594

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED!!!



We are conducting a study to better understand vape use among high school students to improve vaping prevention programs, and we need your help!

Each participant will receive a \$50 gift card as a thank-you!

You may be eligible to participate if you meet the following:

- ▶ Currently enrolled in a Virginia high school?
- ▶ Identify as LGBTQ+?
- ▶ Between the ages of 14–17?
- ▶ Able to complete a brief online survey?
- ▶ Able to have a confidential online interview?

Interested? Simply scan the QR code to check your eligibility



This research is being conducted by Dr. Rima Nakkash from the Global and Community Health Department at George Mason University. She may be reached at 703-993-3126 and rnakkash@gmu.edu for questions or to report a research-related problem. You may also contact the George Mason University Institutional Review Board office at 703-993-4121 or IRB@gmu.edu if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the research, using this RAMP ID number: STUDY00000189.

KEY EXPERTS NEEDED FOR LGBTQ+ STUDY!!!

**We are conducting a study to better understand
vape use among LGBTQ+ high-school aged
youth and we need your help!**

**You are invited to participate in our
study if you:**

- ▶ **Have worked with LGBTQ+ youth, youths, and/
or on tobacco research projects in Virginia.**
- ▶ **Able to sign a consent form with further details**
- ▶ **Able to have a confidential 1-hr. online interview**

Consent form



Schedule interview



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