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Vaping plan up in smoke

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Leading supplier pulls out

Rory Williams

The Albanese government’s vape strategy is in disarray with new figures revealing just one in every 1686 vape sales, excluding those involving prescriptions, occur legally through a pharmacy.

To make matters worse, one of the country’s largest legal vape suppliers is pulling out entirely, warning the system is “unreasonable” and fuelling the black market.

Under the current scheme, adults can buy vapes from a pharmacist without a prescription.

Yet documents obtained by The Courier Mail under the Freedom of Information Act show pharmacists submitted an average of just 5932 supply notifications per month between October and April under the Therapeutic Goods Ad-

ministration (TGA)’s SAS C S3 system.

The TGA figures only count pharmacist-initiated sales through the SAS C system. They don’t include prescriptions written by GPs, data the TGA admits it doesn’t collect.

That compares to TGA estimates that more than 10 million vapes are sold nationally every month on the black market.

Phillip Morris, which planned to provide the VEEV range of products to pharmacies, has confirmed it will withdraw from the Australian market on July 1.

In a letter to pharmacies, the company said it was “simply not possible” to meet the TGA’s new technical standards within the deadline and blamed the regulator for refusing to grant more time.

It warned the move would

disrupt patient care, push smokers back to cigarettes and hand the market to black market traders.

The decision is a major blow to the government’s model, which relies entirely on pharmacies to supply therapeutic vapes under strict conditions.

But most pharmacies aren’t interested. While there are more than 5900 pharmacies across the country, only about 700 are participating in the scheme each month.

Those that do are averaging just one legal vape sale every two or three days.

The TGA also concedes the number of participating pharmacies may be inflated, due to duplicate entries in the system.

Pharmacist John Than said he had sold just one vape since the new regulations came into effect in October 2024.

“Either people don’t know they can buy vapes from pharmacies, or they are choosing to buy them illegally elsewhere,” he said.

“We’ve sold one vape ... one vape in under nine months.”

“Either way, this shows that the new laws are not working.”

The Department of Health confirmed there were no documents to prove it conducted a feasibility study, a cost-benefit analysis or enforcement review before launching the pharmacy-only scheme.

Health Minister Mark Butler said Australia was “turning the corner” on vaping, with youth use dropping and smoking at record lows.