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Generating knowledge for public health

Nicotine Pouch Use in Canada: Market Overview and Trends

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Public Health Ontario Rounds | September 23, 2026

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Disclosure of Potential Conflicts of Interest

The presenters--Robert Schwartz, Michael Chaiton, and Lynn Planinac--have no real, perceived or potential conflicts of interest in relation to this presentation.

Learning Objectives

1. Describe the current state of the nicotine market in Canada including how nicotine pouches are sold, marketed and regulated.
2. Summarize the recent trends in nicotine pouch use in Canada, especially among young adults.
3. Recognize emerging data on nicotine pouch health effects and potential usefulness for smoking cessation.

What are nicotine pouches?



- 01 Placed between lip and gum
- 02 Nicotine absorbed through oral mucosa
- 03 No tobacco leaf in tobacco-free pouches

A **4 mg** pouch can deliver nicotine exposure similar to a lozenge in controlled studies.

High-dose products can produce exposure **comparable to or above a cigarette** .

Formulations vary in dose, pH, flavour and release kinetics.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Pouches remove combustion and inhalation. They do not remove nicotine exposure, dependence potential, local oral exposure, or product-specific uncertainty.

Regulatory Policies

Review of Canada's NP policy in comparative perspective

- In the beginning, in 2023
 - approved as Natural Health Product NRT to help smokers quit
 - No restrictions on flavours, nicotine concentrations
 - No age restriction
 - Available for sale anywhere
- And then, in 2024
 - restricted to mint, menthol flavours
 - Restricted to 4 mg nicotine per pouch
 - Age 18 + only
 - Available only behind the counter in pharmacies

In comparison with e-cigarette policy

Two products with similar characteristics:

- Deliver nicotine with no combustion
- Claims to have therapeutic benefits for smoking cessation
- Possibly similar health effects, but largely unknown for NPs and still emerging for E-cigarettes. Possibility that NPs will be less harmful – but certainly not harmless (see next slides)

Health effects

← LOWER COMBUSTION-RELATED TOXICANT EXPOSURE

HIGHER →

No nicotine / no tobacco

Nicotine pouches

Vaping

Cigarettes

42–96%

Much lower exposure to many smoke toxicants

Reductions in most measured biomarkers in switching trials versus continued smoking.

≈

Nicotine exposure remains substantial

Exclusive pouch users can have nicotine biomarkers comparable to cigarette smokers.

20

Regulators recognize product-specific relative risk

FDA authorized a modified-risk claim for 20 ZYN products in June 2026 — versus cigarettes, for complete switching.

Health effects

Evidence is strongest for acute nicotine effects and local oral changes; long-term disease risk is still poorly characterized.

Oral mucosa

Case series and cross-sectional studies report localized lesions, erythema, irritation and other mucosal changes at pouch placement sites.

Acute cardiovascular effects

Higher-dose pouches can raise heart rate and arterial-stiffness measures during use; effects scale with nicotine delivery.

Dependence & youth

Nicotine is addictive. Adolescents and young adults may be particularly susceptible to dependence and neurodevelopmental effects.

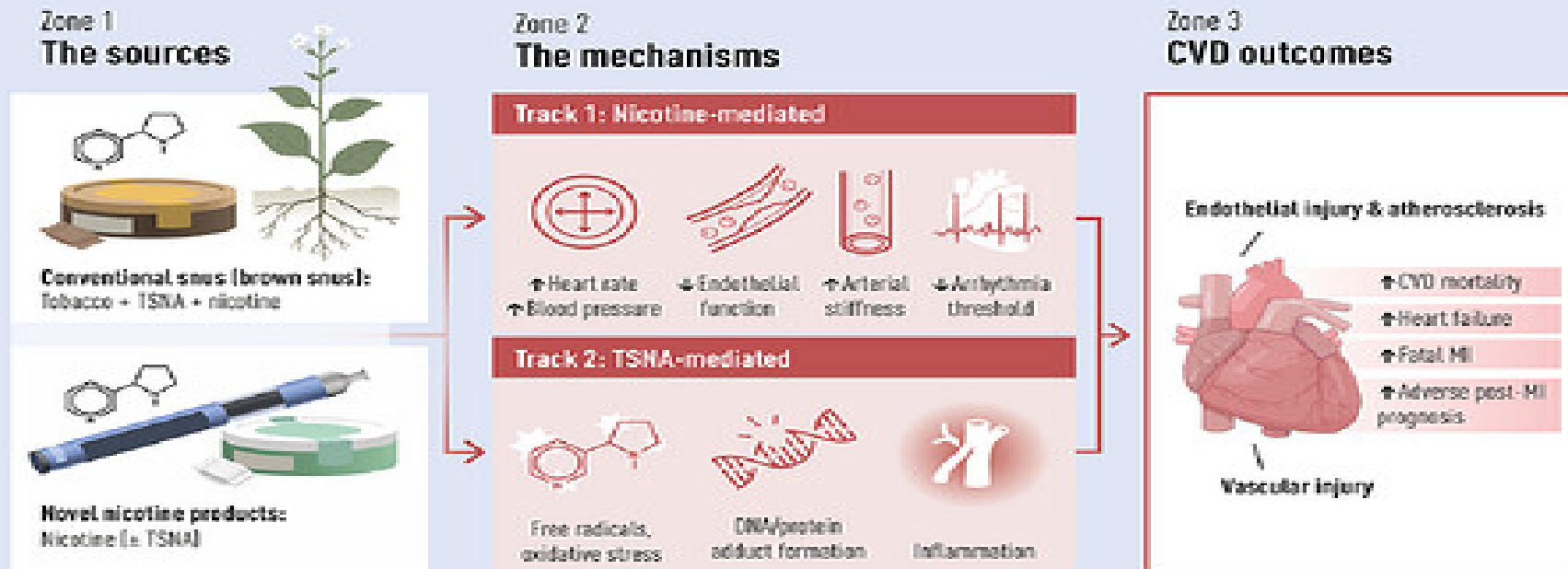
Poisoning & dose variability

Unauthorized or high-dose products can deliver far more nicotine; accidental pediatric exposure is a recognized poisoning risk.

EVIDENCE
GAP

Long-term cancer, cardiovascular, metabolic and periodontal outcomes cannot yet be estimated with confidence for nicotine pouches as a class.

Snus, nicotine pouches and cardiovascular disease: Evidence, mechanisms, and the challenge of novel nicotine products Olsson et al.



High impact of cessation intervention: ~25-50% quitters at 6 months

Nicotine absorption

Each pouch may result in about 2 mg nicotine absorbed; if in a day 5 pouches used = 10 mg

If an e-cigarette user consumes 1 ml of e-liquid in a day, they may absorb 10 to 18 mg of nicotine

So, it all depends on user characteristics and use patterns

At legal levels in Canada:

Nicotine pouches deliver substantial doses of nicotine even if possibly less than e-cigarettes

In comparison with e-cigarette policy

	Nicotine Pouches	E-Cigarettes
Where sold	Behind counter in pharmacies	Flavoured - Adult only vape shops Unflavoured – convenience stores
Strength*	4 mg per pouch	20 mg per ml (2%)
Flavours	Only mint and menthol	In adult only vape shops, any flavour

In comparison with other jurisdictions

PROHIBITED

**NICOTINE
RESTRICTIONS**

LEGAL

Australia
Belgium
New Zealand

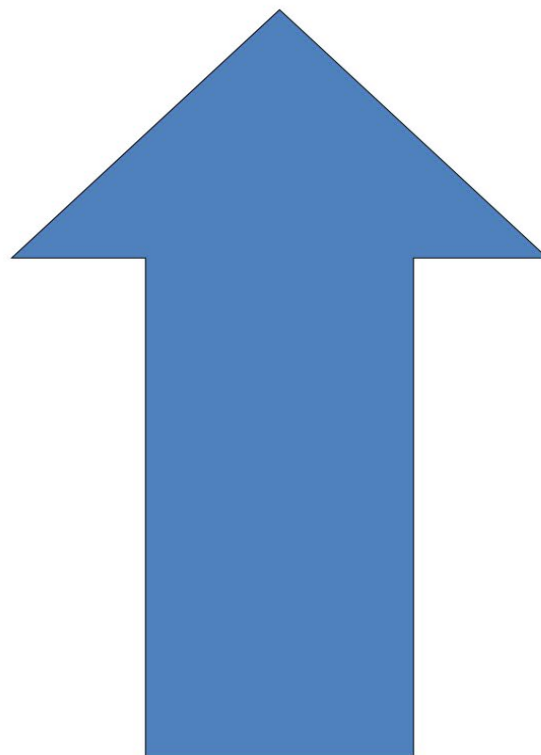
Canada
Czech Republic
Denmark
Italy
US (9 mg)

Sweden

In comparison with other nicotine products

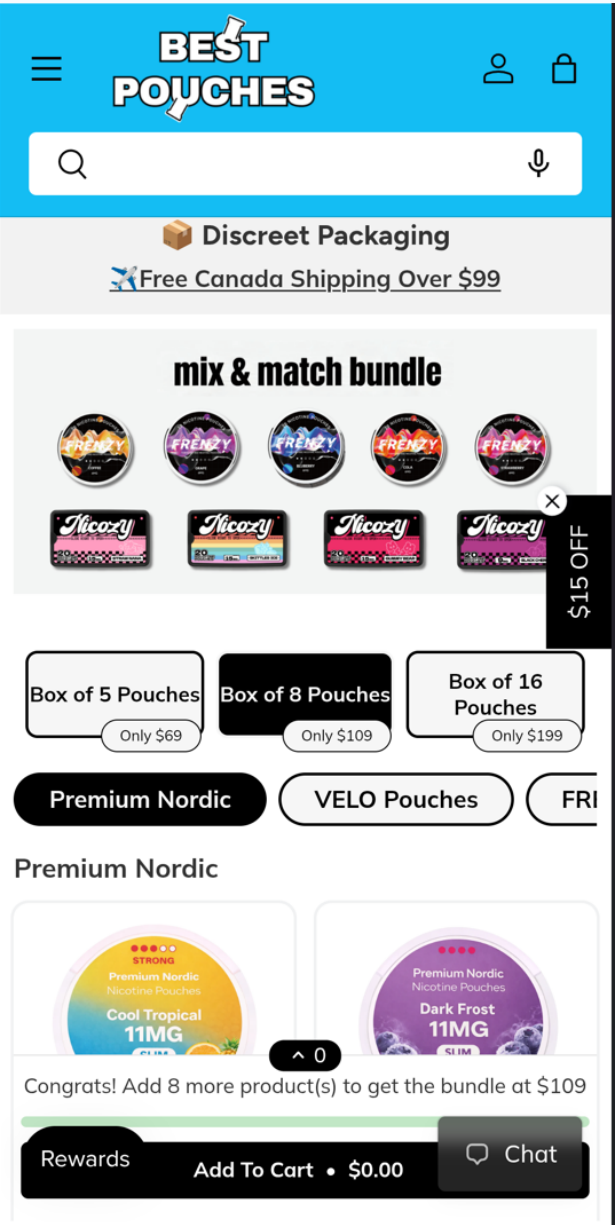


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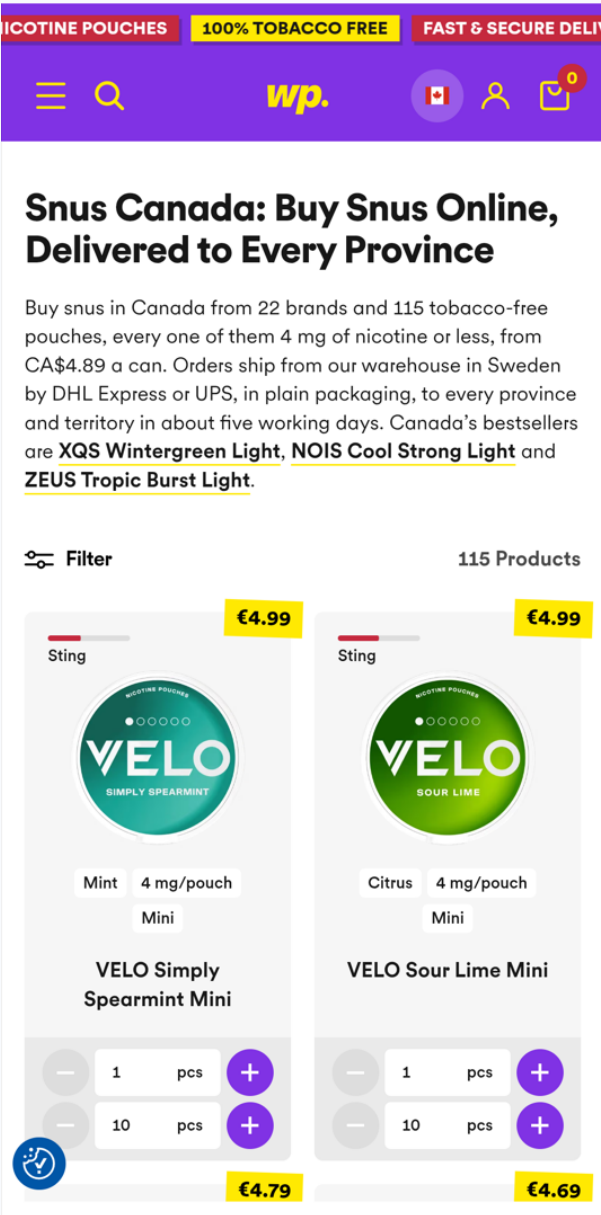


Online Culture & Illegal Sales

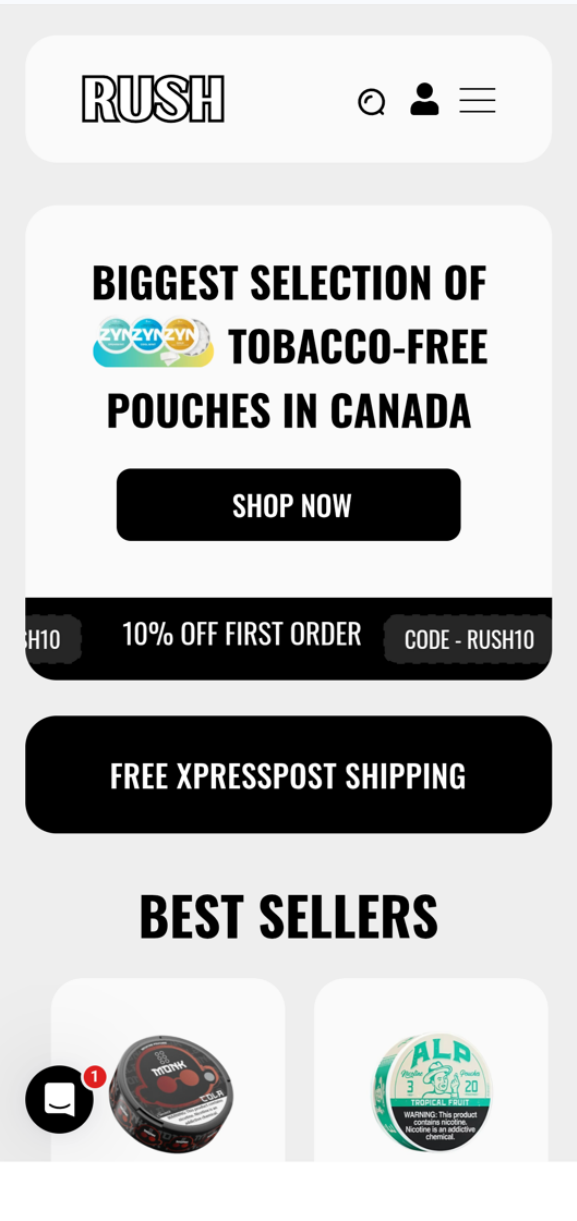
Online Sales



Screenshot:
bestpouches.ca



Screenshot:
www.whitepouches.com/ca



Screenshot:
rushtins.com

Convenience store sales

Nicotine pouches are being illegally sold in corner stores across Canada

Experts warn they're highly addictive and can harm young, developing brains



Idil Mussa, Albert Leung, Britnei Bilhete · CBC News ·

Posted: Dec 03, 2025 4:00 AM EST | Last Updated: December 3, 2025



Listen to this article ⓘ

Estimated 7 minutes



Stores caught on hidden camera illegally selling nicotine pouches



December 2, 2025 | 6:30

BUSINESS

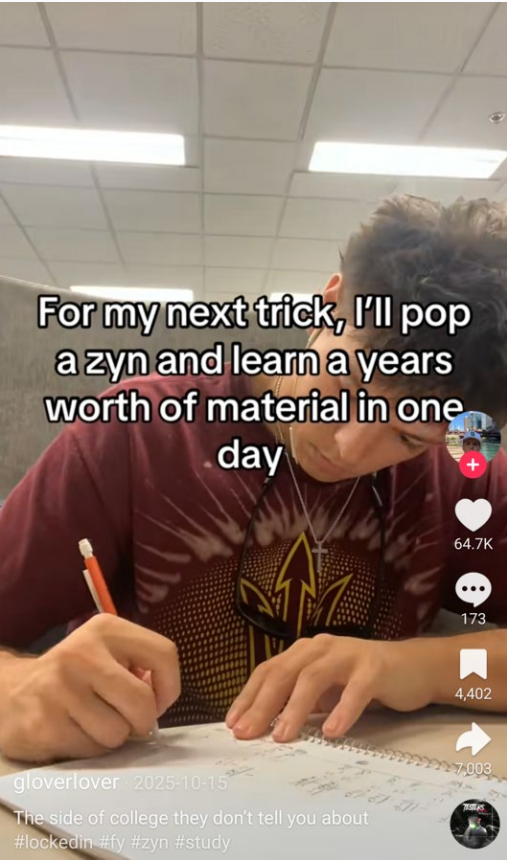
Teens across Toronto are buying illicit nicotine pouches. Now convenience stores want to sell them legally – should we let them?

Use of the highly-addictive pouches among young Canadians has soared by 600% and health professionals are concerned.

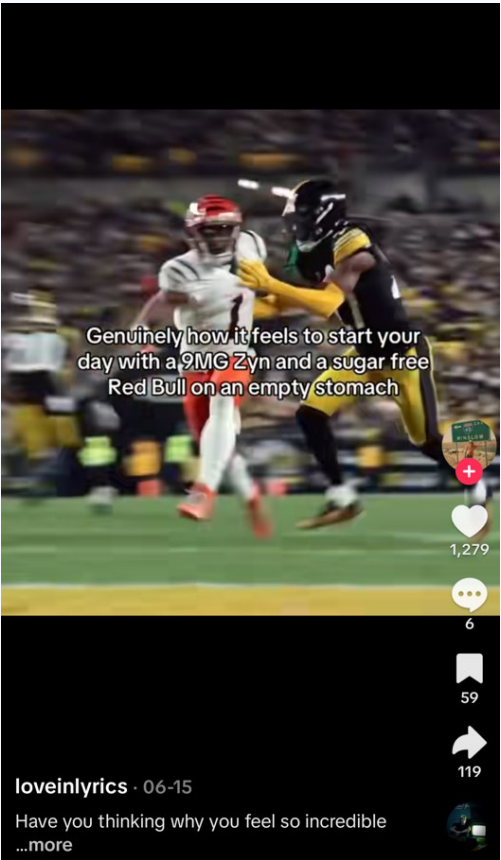
March 7, 2026 | Updated July 7, 2026 | 8 min read



Social media content



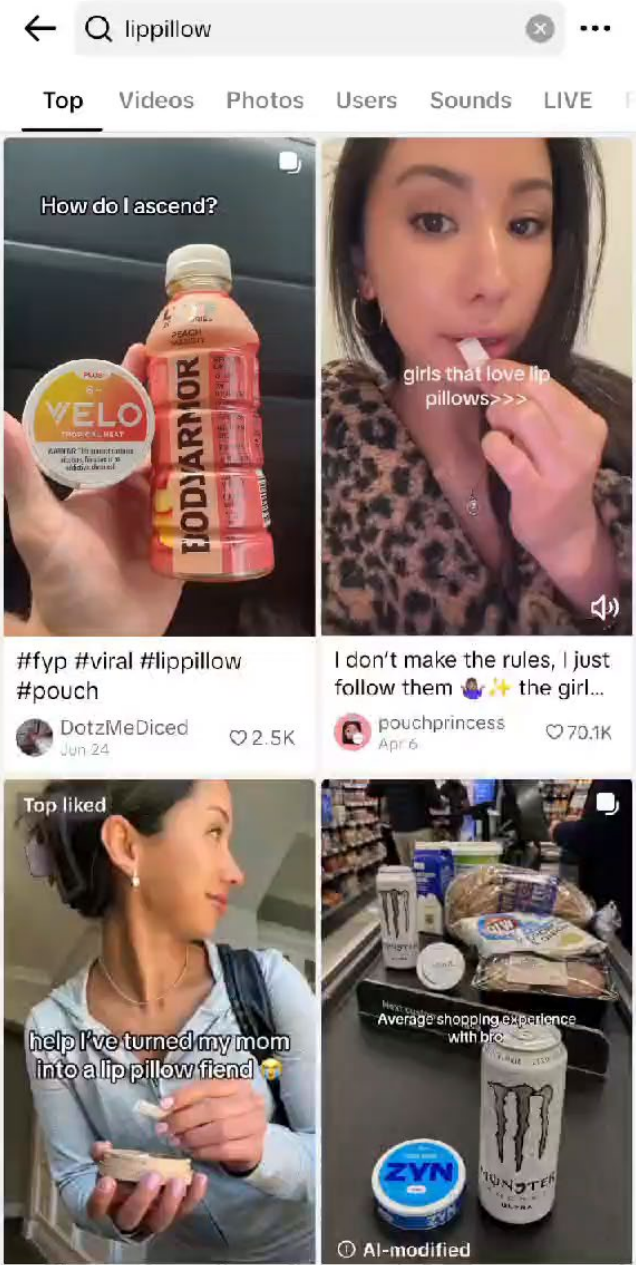
Source: TikTok account
gloverlover



Source: TikTok account
loveinlyrics



Source: TikTok account
Muzza



Pharmacy displays



Photo credit: M. Druss-Wong

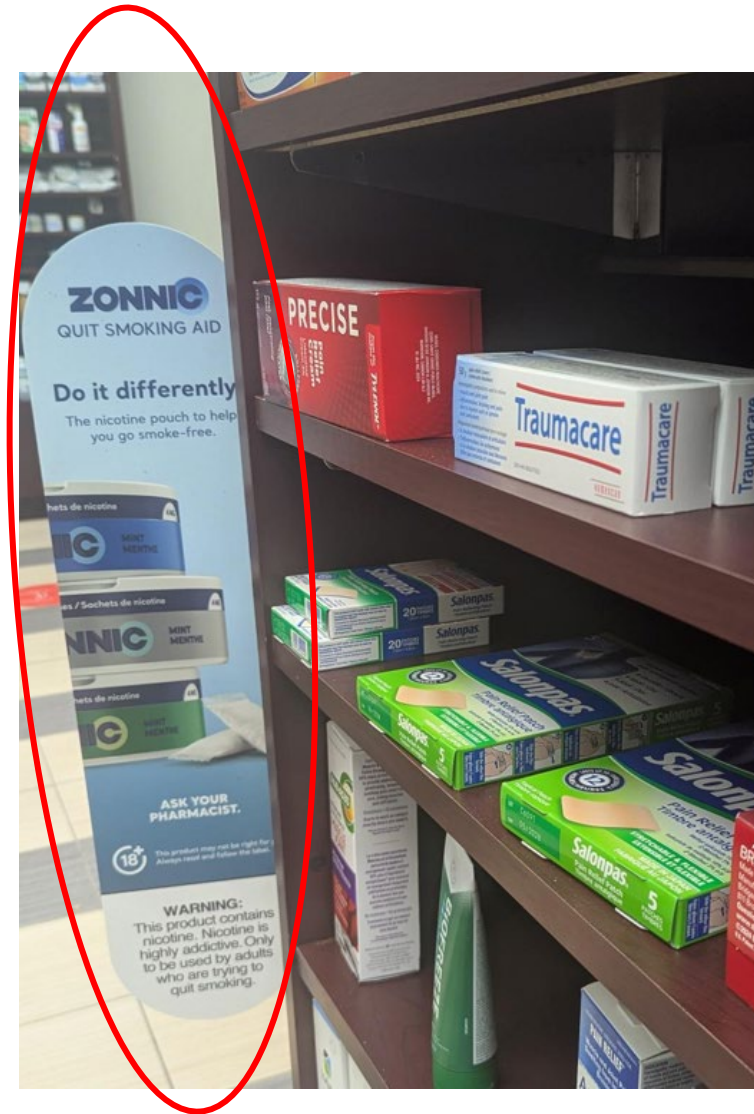


Photo credit L. Planinac

Promotions

**Quit
smoking
on your
terms.**

Available in select
pharmacies

LEARN MORE



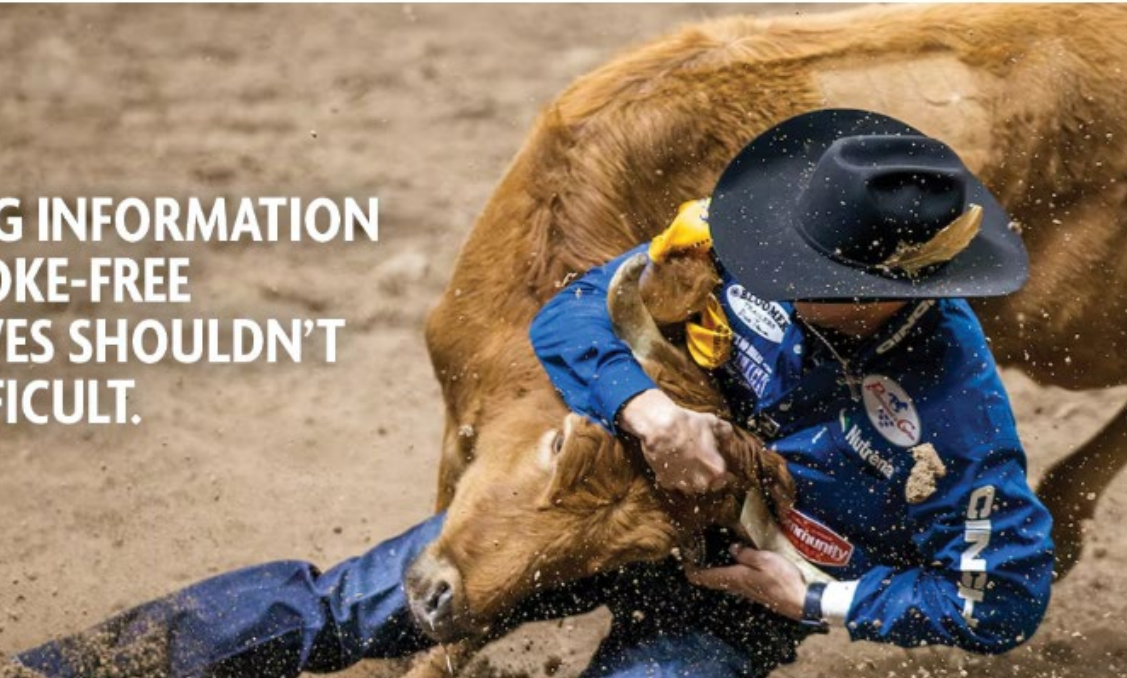
ZONNIC NICOTINE
REPLACEMENT THERAPY

WARNING: This product contains nicotine. Nicotine is highly addictive.
Only to be used by adults who are trying to quit smoking.
This product may not be right for you. Always read and follow the label.

18+

Source: www.zonnic.ca

**WRANGLING INFORMATION
ABOUT SMOKE-FREE
ALTERNATIVES SHOULDN'T
BE THIS DIFFICULT.**



FIRE-FREE, LIGHTER-FREE, SMOKE-FREE OPTIONS EXIST.

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT YOUR OPTIONS AT **UNSMOKE.ca**

Source: www.unsmoke.ca

BACKGROUND

Do nicotine pouches help people stop smoking?

STUDY	DESIGN	EXPOSURE	FINDING
Wagener et al. 2024	Pilot RCT, adults with low SES	4 mg pouch, 8 weeks	Cigarettes/day 15.0 → 8.3; one participant (8.3%) fully switched
Fucito et al. 2025	Pilot RCT, N=30	3 vs 6 mg pouch, 4 weeks	Smoking fell in both groups; 13% vs 0% abstinent at week 4 (n.s.)
Erinoso et al. 2026	PATH cross-sectional	Use in quit attempts	Among tobacco users making a quit attempt, 5.9% used pouches to try to quit
Choi et al. 2026	National retrospective cohort	Dual pouch + tobacco use	10.1% quit all tobacco vs 23.7% among non-pouch users; none switched to exclusive pouches

BOTTOM LINE

Evidence of substitution and cigarette reduction, but lacking robust pouch-specific studies compared to NRT

Wagener et al., Nicotine Tob Res 2024; Fucito et al., Tob Control 2025; Erinoso et al., 2026; Choi et al., Tob Control 2026.

Research gap and study objectives

The gap

No prior longitudinal study of pouch use among Canadian youth and young adults.

Little evidence on whether pouch use precedes initiation, cessation — or both.

Regulatory changes occurred during the observation window.



STUDY

Study design and cohort

Longitudinal prospective cohort with four pouch-use measurement waves.

WAVE 1 · JUL 2022 n=1,899	WAVE 2 · OCT 2022 n=2,246	WAVE 3 · APR 2023 n=1,429	WAVE 4 · FEB 2026 n=1,677
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2,348

participants

with ≥2 pouch-use observations

7,489

person-wave records

longitudinal analytic dataset

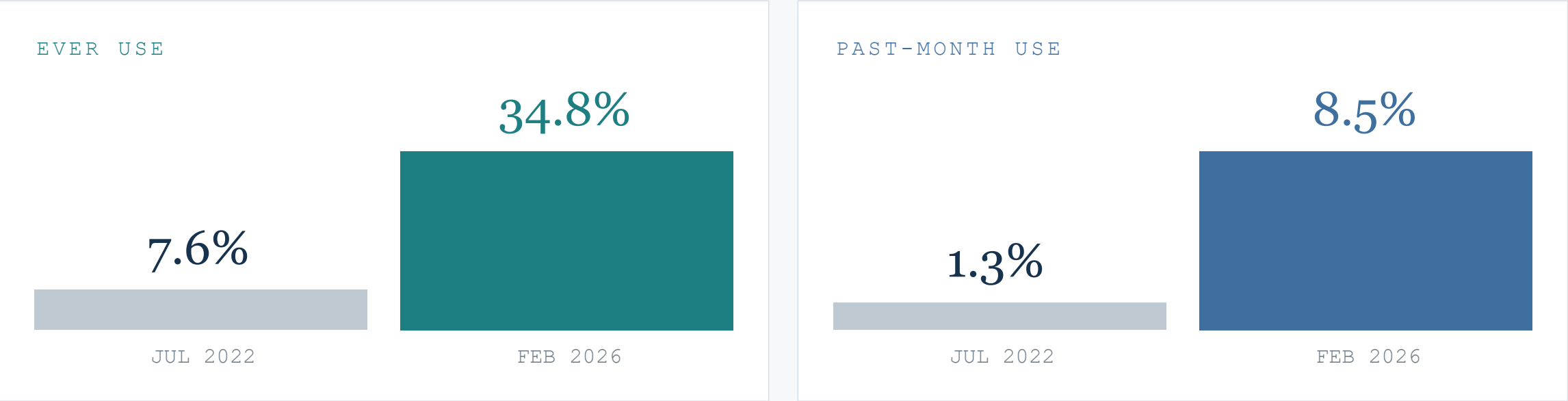
COHORT
PROFILE

66% women · 59% aged 19–25 · recruited via social media

RESULTS

Pouch use rose sharply across the study period

Both experimentation and recent use increased between 2022 and 2026.



429 new pouch users during follow-up

7.9 initiations / 100 PY
95% CI 7.2–8.7

15.1% past-month persistence across waves

RESULTS

Who was most likely to use pouches?

Male gender and use of other nicotine products were the clearest adjusted correlates.

GENDER



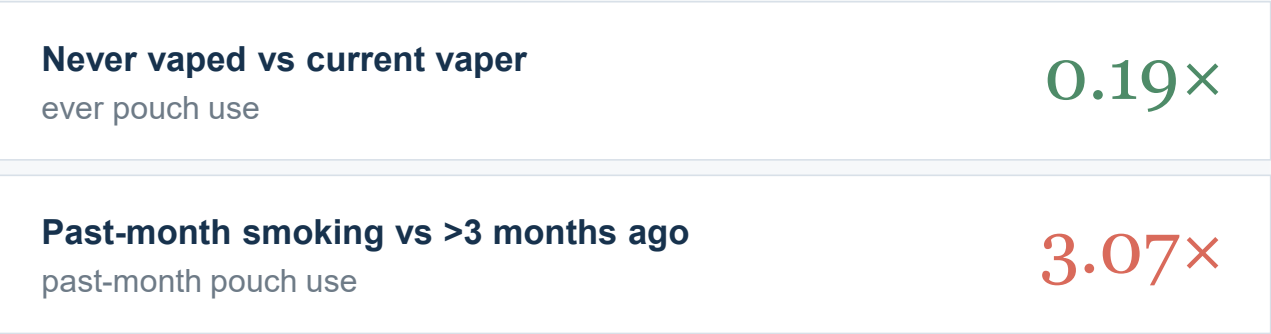
WEIGHTED PREVALENCE

Men 22.4% ever | 5.1% past month

Women 13.8% ever | 1.1% past month

Across all waves

POUCH USE CLUSTERED WITH OTHER NICOTINE USE



RESULTS

Pouch use predicted both onset and cessation

OUTCOME	POUCH STATE	ODDS RATIO (LOG SCALE)	AOR (95% CI)
Smoking onset	Ever, not past month		2.08 (1.43–3.04)
Vaping onset	Ever, not past month		1.52 (0.99–2.33)
Smoking onset	Past month		1.34 (0.49–3.65)
Vaping onset	Past month		3.67 (1.41–9.60)
Smoking cessation	Ever, not past month		0.87 (0.57–1.33)
Vaping cessation	Ever, not past month		0.79 (0.52–1.20)
Smoking cessation	Past month		4.45 (1.77–11.23)
Vaping cessation	Past month		1.41 (0.65–3.05)
		0.3 0.5 1 2 5 10 15	

Table 3. GEE models adjusted for origin wave, age, sex, race, education, province, smoking and vaping status.

RESULTS

Cessation effect was specific to active use

Past-month pouch use was associated with stopping current smoking at the next observed follow-up.

SMOKING CESSATION

4.45×

odds of cessation

95% CI 1.77–11.23 · $p = 0.002$

Past-month pouch use vs never use. Ever, not current use: aOR
0.87 (0.57–1.33)

VAPING CESSATION

1.41×

odds of cessation

95% CI 0.65–3.05 · not significant

Past-month pouch use vs never use. Ever, not current use: aOR
0.79 (0.52–1.20)

CAVEAT

The outcome is transition out of past-month smoking at the next observed survey

INTERPRETATION

How can initiation and cessation findings coexist?

A single product can have different effects across populations, motivations, and stages of nicotine use.

PATHWAY A · EXPANSION

Curiosity, flavours, discretion, social media

Use among people not currently smoking

Poly-nicotine experimentation

Observed: higher smoking / vaping onset



PATHWAY B · SUBSTITUTION

Active use by current smokers

Non-combustible nicotine replacement

Possible cigarette substitution

Observed: higher smoking cessation

Population impact depends on the balance between **substitution among smokers** and **uptake among people who otherwise would not use nicotine**.

Questions & Answers