

Program's memo



Don't poo poo cancer screening!

By Bethany Knight

Bendigo Community Health Services is working to ensure new migrants and refugees have a better understanding of cancer and Australia's cancer screening programs.

BCHS has partnered with Melbourne Polytechnic to take cancer screening education into Adult Migrant English Program classrooms, beginning with the classes at Bendigo TAFE.

Refugee Cancer Services Project Facilitator Lisa Carson said the initiative has included developing resources and delivering information about cancer and cancer screening in a way that is understandable, accessible, and culturally safe for new arrivals.

"The hope is that this will bring cancer screening to a lot more people," Lisa said.

"For example, if people get a bowel cancer kit in the mail, they won't just throw it in the bin, they'll know it's important."

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- Our services, plus more.



Top left: Refugee Cancer Services Project Facilitator Lisa Carson with props she made for the classes. Above: Staff from BCHS and Bendigo TAFE say it's an important topic.



Acknowledgement of Country

Bendigo Community Health Services acknowledge we live, work and enjoy Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung Country. We extend our appreciation to the Djaara and Taungurung peoples. We pay respect to Elders past and present for their continued holding of memories, traditions, culture and community aspirations. We recognise sovereignty has never been ceded and express our sorrow for the personal, spiritual and cultural costs of colonisation and their lasting impact. May we walk forward together in harmony and the spirit of healing. It was and always will be Aboriginal land.



We support people to develop and maintain their personal, gender, sexual, cultural religious and spiritual identity.

BCHS is proud of:



Quality
Improvement
Council
'Yes ... we are
a QIC accredited
organisation'



Lessons making mark

FROM PAGE 1

The program consists of five modules: What is Cancer?, Breast Cancer Screening, Bowel Cancer Screening, Cervical Screening, and A Healthy Lifestyle. It also has the aid of interpreters and the students' regular teachers.

"From a cultural perspective, it can be a challenge for students to talk about cancer," Lisa said. "But the students have so far welcomed the knowledge with a willingness to learn."

Lisa said the lessons are kept engaging thanks to the props and materials BCHS has collated and developed, which include cancer screening kits and tools, toilet seats, and even cute squishy poo characters.

The feedback from Bendigo TAFE teachers about the bowel cancer class in particular was positive. They said it was one of the best because they all laughed together and had some fun.

"It (cancer) is not meant to be a dark and gloomy topic," Lisa said. "It's about giving the students' knowledge to understand what's available to them in Australia."

BCHS expects to deliver the program to more than 130 students over 12 months at Bendigo TAFE, Chisholm Institute Dandenong, Glen Eira Adult Learning Centre, and via the Volunteer Tutor Scheme. Read our full story at bchs.com.au

The Refugee Cancer Services Project is supported by the Victorian Government.



PROUD TO SUPPORT PRIDE IN THE PARK



BCHS was proud to be on hand at the Pride in the Park festival last month. We recognise and stand with the LGBTIQ+ community. BCHS strives to contribute to a more inclusive society where everyone's rights are protected, and voices are heard. We are committed to continuous learning to deliver safe, trusted and respectful services to all in our community.

Get social
with us:



www.bchs.com.au

BCHS SECURES MAJOR GRANT

AOD Clinical Services
Senior Leader
Amanda Gould and
AOD and Mental
Health Services
Operations Manager
Cilla Boucher.



In a significant win for Greater Bendigo's most vulnerable residents, BCHS has been awarded a \$750,000 Victorian Government grant to enhance its Specialist Pharmacotherapy Program.

BCHS AOD and Mental Health Services Operations Manager Cilla Boucher said the Department of Health funding, to be delivered over three years, will improve how opioid dependence treatment is delivered and address critical service gaps that have long challenged patients and healthcare providers.

"This is absolutely transformative," said Cilla. "For too long, we've had to turn away new clients due to limited prescriber capacity. Now we can open our doors again to those who desperately need this life-saving treatment."

The funds will support four major service improvements: a dedicated Long-Acting Injectable Buprenorphine clinic, an Integrated Care Clinic for primary health needs, a dedicated AOD Navigator to help clients with service access, and a telehealth partnership with Western Health's addiction specialists.

BCHS has delivered Opioid Dependence Treatment since 1992 and currently supports

173 clients, with nearly two-thirds being men aged between 41-60 years. Among these clients, 79 per cent do not have a current GP and 78 per cent are unemployed, highlighting the complex social barriers many face.

"These aren't just statistics – they're people with real struggles who deserve compassionate, comprehensive care," Cilla said.

John, a client who has been with the service for eight years, said before coming to BCHS, he was constantly in and out of hospital.

"Now I have stability, I've reconnected with my family, and for the first time in 15 years, I have hope for my future," he said.

"The staff here don't judge – they treat you like a person, not a problem."

Cilla said for those struggling with opioid dependence in Bendigo, the funding represents hope, dignity, and a community that cares. "This grant means we can now say 'yes' to more people who reach out for help," she said.

The project will begin in mid-2025, with services gradually expanded over the funding period. Visit bchs.com.au for the full story.

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		1	2	3	4 Last day school for Term 1	5
6	7 World Health Day	8	9	10	11 World Parkinson's Day	12
13	14	15	16 Bendigo Art Gallery: Viva la Vida with Frida: Headpiece making session	17	18 Good Friday & the start of the Bendigo Easter Festival	19 Easter Saturday
20 Easter Sunday	21 Easter Monday	22	23	24	25 ANZAC Day	26
27	28 Pay it Forward Day	29	30			

What's on in April...

Medical clinic opening hours

Bendigo Central

includes our Sexual and Reproductive Health Hub

Address: 165-171

Hargreaves Street

Phone: (03) 5406 1200

Email: bchs@bchs.com.au

Monday-Thursday:

8am-5pm

Friday: 8am-4.30pm

Saturday/Sunday: Closed

Kangaroo Flat

Address: 19 Helm Street

Phone: (03) 5406 1200

Email: bchs@bchs.com.au

Monday-Thursday:

8am-5pm

Friday: 8am-4.30pm

Saturday/Sunday: Closed

BCHS' Eaglehawk services have moved to various temporary locations while we refurbish.

The medical practice has moved to 75 Mitchell Street, Bendigo.

Phone: (03) 5406 1200

Email: bchs@bchs.com.au

Monday-Thursday: 8am-5pm Friday: 8am-4.30pm

Saturday/Sunday: Closed

The allied health services have moved to:

- Active Living Program & Physiotherapy – 501A Napier Street, White Hills and 19 Helm Street, Kangaroo Flat
- Podiatry – 19 Helm Street, Kangaroo Flat and 165-171 Hargreaves Street, Bendigo
- Forensic mental health – 165-171 Hargreaves Street, Bendigo
- Chronic disease management – 165-171 Hargreaves Street, Bendigo and 75 Mitchell Street, Bendigo
- Sexual health nurse – 165-171 Hargreaves Street, Bendigo.

FROM MYANMAR TO MEDICINE

Lived experience drives BCHS' newest doctor

By Emma Sartori

Dr Joshua Columbus feels a deep calling to community health.

Born in remote jungle among the Karen Resistance Group, on the border of Thailand and Myanmar, Bendigo Community Health Services (BCHS) newest general practitioner understands better than most the complex needs some people face.

"My own background as a refugee and my experiences growing up in underserved communities have deeply influenced my commitment to rural healthcare, refugee health and supporting marginalised populations," he tells.

With his family forced to flee to Thailand when he was just eight months old, Dr Columbus completed his schooling in refugee camps before receiving a scholarship to study in Canada from the World University Service of Canada, an organisation dedicated to supporting refugees around the world to access higher education.

He has studied diplomas, bachelor and master degrees all around the world, as well as working in hospitals from Townsville to Swan Hill, now though, Dr Columbus has settled in Bendigo and is working toward his Fellowship with the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners.

Rural medicine and supporting the health and wellbeing of refugees is where his passion lies.

"Medicine is not just about knowledge - it's about compassion, dedication and the ability to connect with patients on a human level."



Dr Joshua Columbus believes education is a journey of resilience, growth, and the invaluable lessons learned through challenges.

"I chose to work in community health because of my deep connection to underserved populations, particularly the Karen refugee community.

"Working at BCHS allows me to provide culturally sensitive care, address health disparities and support those who often struggle to navigate the healthcare system.

"Having experienced displacement myself, I understand the unique challenges these communities face, from limited access to medical services to language and cultural barriers.

"Working in this area has been incredibly rewarding, allowing me to build strong connections with patients and provide care that is both meaningful and impactful. It is a fulfilling way to give back."

Having overcome and achieved so much, Dr Columbus says prioritising balance is what has helped him succeed.

"My journey to medicine was not a straight path but a series of experiences that have taught me that persistence, adaptability and passion are just as important as academic achievements," he says.

A message for our Karen community, all peoples of Myanmar (Burma), locally and across the world

We stand with you and see the immense devastation of the recent Myanmar (Burma) earthquakes. We are heartbroken and send our deepest sympathies. We hold you under our canopy of care as you continue to strive for peace and independence. Support is available through our Culturally Sensitive Counselling. Call 5406 1200 to make an appointment.



Job vacancies

Health Access Program General Practitioner

- Fixed term, 15.2 hours per fortnight (0.2 FTE)
- Applications close April 14

We are seeking a general practitioner (GP) to join a pilot program designed to improve healthcare access for individuals at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

The priority of the Health Access Program (HAP) is to increase engagement with primary healthcare services by providing community-based health support and addressing barriers to care.

The HAP GP will work alongside the nurse practitioner and community connectors, providing comprehensive clinical care, including health assessments, treatment, preventative care and chronic disease management while also working collaboratively with community organisations and social services to ensure holistic, wrap-around care.

Responsibilities will include, but are not limited to:

- Delivering trauma-informed, non-judgmental, and person-centred healthcare.
- Supporting individuals to navigate the healthcare system, addressing barriers to access and facilitating continuity of care.

For more information visit the Careers page on bchs.com.au.

SERVICE SPOTLIGHT

Doctors in Secondary Schools program

As an organisation with more than 50+ services, we'd really like to highlight the wonderful and hardworking people who work at Bendigo Community Health Services and what we can do for you, so welcome to Service Spotlight. If you see anything featured in here that you'd like more information about, please email bchs@bchs.com.au.

A partnership between BCHS, Murray Primary Health Network and the Victorian Education Department, the Doctors in Secondary Schools (DISS) program is a bulk-billed GP clinic open to students in eligible schools in the Bendigo region.

What does the program aim to achieve?

DISS aims to improve healthcare access to vulnerable students by offering free and confidential GP and nurse-led appointments covering general health, mental health and wellbeing, sexual health, referral and blood test access, and any health and wellbeing concerns.

Who can access the program and how? The following schools are participating in the program and offer one clinic per week during school term:

- Wedderburn College (Monday)
- St Arnaud Secondary School (Tuesday)
- Eaglehawk Secondary College (Wednesday)
- Crusoe College (Thursday)
- Weeroona College (Friday).

To book, students are encouraged to speak to their school or can present to the clinic on the day DISS are at the school to arrange an appointment with the clinic nurse.

What would you like the community to know about the program?

All students at a participating school are able to attend the clinic. They can attend alone or have a family member or support person present.

Anything else to add...

The clinic features two doctors and three nurses. Each clinic runs for approximately 4-6 hours. For more details visit bchs.com.au.



Dr Jo and nurse Michelle are part of the service.



Health Promotion officers Lucy and Christine with posters created by kids during the session.

SCHOOL'S IN ON VAPE EDUCATION

A new education session for primary school students is sending myths about vaping up in smoke.

Run by the BCHS Health Promotion team, the education program, Prevention of Vaping, is aimed at Grade 5 and 6 students. The session delivers essential information on the risks and harms of vaping, with the goal to give kids the knowledge and confidence to say no to vaping.

“Primary school is a vital time when kids are curious and starting to be influenced by the things that they see and by people around them,” said Health Promotion Officer Lucy Linton. “Knowledge is power and that’s what we want to give them. Our program is not only age-appropriate it’s interactive, which gives us the opportunity to have a conversation with the kids, respond to any questions and debunk some of the myths around vaping.

“We recently delivered our first presentation to about 120 Grade 5 and 6 students at Epsom Primary School, and it was really well received. We covered topics including: What is a vape?; Nicotine; Short-term and long-term effects; Strategies to say no to vaping; and Ways to get help.”

Students were also given the opportunity to get creative and develop a message poster to share their learnings from the session.

“We’re hearing from kids that they think vaping is not cool and it’s not safe so now we want to support them by providing the tools to make an informed choice which empowers them to say no,” Lucy said.

If your school is interested in our Prevention of Vaping education program send an email to healthpromotion@bchs.com.au
Read the full story online at bchs.com.au

Prevention of Vaping education sessions

Term 1: Epsom Primary School

Term 2: Lightning Reef Primary School

Term 3: Marist College Bendigo

Term 4: Big Hill Primary School

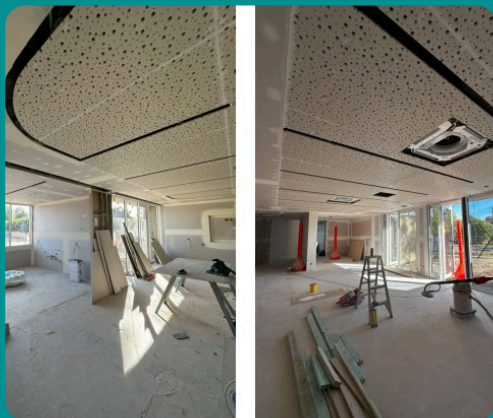
“We have had overwhelmingly positive feedback from staff and students about your Prevention of Vaping presentation. The teachers would love to run it annually and were really impressed by the level of participation from our students.”

Epsom Primary School

Child safety commitment

Bendigo Community Health Services values children from all backgrounds. We are dedicated to making our community a safe, nurturing and welcoming place for children to grow and develop. We are committed to making sure ALL children reach their individual potential. We will do this by supporting families to keep children safe, healthy, happy; helping families support children to reach their full potential; and effectively advocating for children and being a champion for quality outcomes in child health and wellbeing. Visit bchs.com.au to read our child safety commitment in full.

Design takes shape in Seymoure Street



The scaffolding is starting to come down on the Bendigo Community Health Services Eaglehawk site, revealing the clean, contemporary lines of the refurbished building.

Internal plastering and painting are now well underway, and timber panelling and joinery is being installed. Skylights have also been fitted and reveal gorgeous blue views from within the building.

An external skin of fine, perforated metal cladding is ready to be installed in the first half of April, which will be an exciting development for the neighbourhood streetscape.

BCHS staff and EBD Architects have now begun the fun task of choosing furniture for clinical, staff and community areas, in keeping with the building's design.

We can't wait to launch the site - which will help meet the community's health and wellbeing needs for decades to come by featuring more space, more facilities and expanded services - and welcome back our clients to Eaglehawk mid-year.



Sybilla and Eliza can support you through the percept test.

Be well prepared for pregnancy with BCHS

Are you planning or expecting a baby? Did you know BCHS offers two tests for before and during pregnancy.

The percept test

This non-invasive prenatal test estimates the chance your pregnancy may have a chromosome condition.

Our specialist Sexual and Reproductive Health Hub nurses Sybilla and Eliza collect for the test each Wednesday morning at the Central Site. Eliza said BCHS is the only place in Bendigo that offers the percept test.

"We do the collection, and it's then tested through the Victorian Clinical Genetics Service at the Royal Children's Hospital," she said. "We love it because the service includes access to genetic counsellors to support clients where abnormalities or risk of abnormalities have been identified in a pregnancy."

For details on how to access the percept test visit bchs.com.au

Prepair genetic carrier screening home saliva kit

The prepair test is used to see if someone is a genetic carrier for cystic fibrosis, fragile X syndrome or spinal muscular atrophy.

Eliza said in great news for parents-to-be, the test is now funded under Medicare, and free to access at BCHS.

"The person who will become pregnant does the test, and if they come back as a carrier for something, then the partner also takes the test," she said. "Clients can simply come into reception at our Central Site and ask for a kit to take home."

PANTRY PROVES POPULAR



Wyanimbik Wayawan now features a Bendigo Foodshare pantry of fresh produce and everyday essentials to help ease the cost of living for clients accessing our Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) services.

It's been a popular addition to the wellbeing centre and we encourage anyone visiting to grab a bag and take home some complimentary groceries while they're here.

Shout out to our AOD trainee Jason – pictured left – who's been doing a stellar job of ordering, picking up and stocking the pantry goods.

Eaglehawk, walk this way

Walk your way to fitness while seeing the lakes and parks of the Borough with Eaglehawk Explorers, BCHS' new weekly walking group.

Volunteer and group organiser Brian McPherson said the group was relaxed and friendly.

"There's no pressure on anyone, they can come at their leisure and walk at their own pace," he said.

The group, which is free to join, meets each Wednesday at 9.30am at the gym equipment beside



Health Promotion officer Moni with group organiser Brian.

Lake Neangar, off Simpsons Road, Eaglehawk. Email healthpromotion@bchs.com.au or call 5406 1281 to register your attendance.

New clinic starts at BCHS

Bendigo Community Health Services is dedicated to providing safe and inclusive care for all.

Embedded within our Sexual and Reproductive Health Hub is the new Trans and Gender Diverse Clinic.

Running fortnightly to anyone over the age of 16 in need of gender care, scan the QR code to the right for more details on services that are being offered.



Our services at a glance

Did you know we run more than 50 services supporting the community?
Find out more about how we can help you and your family at www.bchs.com.au

ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS

ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS COUNSELLING (ADULT & YOUTH)

Brief and ongoing counselling support, assessment and referrals for individuals and families affected by alcohol and drug use. Youth alcohol and drug counselling provides supportive counselling for young people 16 to 25 years.

ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS CARE AND RECOVERY COORDINATION

Provides support, advocacy and referral for individuals accessing treatment programs.

FAMILY DRUG SUPPORT

Our qualified alcohol & drug counsellor provides support and education to families experiencing challenges related to the use of drugs or alcohol.

MOBILE DRUG SAFETY WORKER

An experienced harm reduction worker is available to individuals anonymously to access NSP services and receive harm reduction education, information and support.

NEEDLE SYRINGE PROGRAM (NSP) OUTREACH TEAM

NSP provides clean injecting equipment, safe sex and health information, harm reduction education, support and referral to health and welfare services.
Phone: 1800 636 514
7.30pm-10.45pm Tuesday – Saturday.

NON-RESIDENTIAL WITHDRAWAL SERVICE (HOME BASED)

Provides non-residential withdrawal treatment and support services in conjunction with your medical practitioner.

RESIDENTIAL WITHDRAWAL SERVICE (NOVA HOUSE)

An adult residential program for people undertaking alcohol and or drug withdrawal for individuals 21 years and over who live in Victoria. An assessment process is required to ensure people are suited for Nova House.

SPECIALIST PHARMACOTHERAPY

Specialist Alcohol and Other Drug practitioners provide Opiate Replacement Therapy. This includes LAIB (Long acting Injectable Buprenorphine), Buprenorphine and Methadone.

PEER SUPPORT WORKER

Our qualified, lived experience worker is there to provide assistance and support to help you navigate your AOD journey.

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

CHILDREN'S HEALTH SERVICES

Providing specialist children's health and allied health services for children, adolescents and their families.

EARLY CHILDHOOD INTERVENTION

Provides group programs for children 2-5 years who have a self or managed NDIS plan.

FAMILY DAY CARE

Provides quality education and care for children up to 12 years of age in the homes of approved educators.

FAMILY SERVICES

Family Services offers an outreach service that assists children and parents to identify goals and respond to their unique needs and concerns.

Family Services takes the time to get to know what the family's strengths and challenges are for children and young people and then works together with parents and carers to make plans to address these needs.

PAEDIATRIC PHYSIOTHERAPY AND PODIATRY

Provides assessment, management and support for children and adolescents.

PHYSIOTHERAPY

Provides assessment, management and support for adolescents and adults who have concerns with mobility and acute/chronic pain

SMALLTALK SUPPORTED PLAYGROUP AND IN HOME SUPPORT

With a qualified facilitator, Smalltalk uses a set of strategies that parents can use to enhance the home learning environment for children from birth to school age. The Smalltalk program is delivered through 5 supported playgroups and can be offered to individual families in their home.

COUNSELLING AND MENTAL HEALTH

CULTURALLY SENSITIVE COUNSELLING

Available to people of refugee background and in a relaxed private space, talk about your worries and start to find ways to cope with them. You will receive acceptance, support and respect in a safe and non-judgmental environment.

COUNSELLING AND MENTAL HEALTH

Short to medium term counselling, holistic assessments, referral adults working towards better health and well-being. Includes depression, anxiety, relationship issues, family difficulties, grief and loss.



EDUCATION & PARTNERSHIPS

HEALTH PROMOTION AND EDUCATION

A range of programs and initiatives that empower individuals to gain the skills, knowledge and confidence needed for better health and wellbeing. We also offer skilled speakers are available to address groups on health and wellbeing issues.

HEALTH JUSTICE PARTNERSHIPS

BCHS clients have access to free and confidential legal advice from a lawyer provided by Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre.

WORKPLACE AND EMPLOYMENT HEALTH

Supporting workplaces to assess and develop specific workplace health programs to suit their needs.

STAYING HEALTHY

DIABETES SERVICE

Nurse-led clinic providing information, education & clinical care to people living with diabetes. Referral required. Includes Type 1, Type 2 & other types of diabetes, CGM starts and reviews available.

COMMUNITY DIABETES CLINIC

Short-term doctor-led clinic for people living with Type 2 diabetes requiring medical intervention and management. GP or specialist referral required.

ELMORE SOCIAL SUPPORT GROUP

Offers support to frail, aged or disabled men and women to assist to maintain independence in the Elmore Community.

EXERCISE PHYSIOLOGY

Offers exercise & lifestyle support to assist in the prevention & management of health conditions and injuries.

FALLS AND BALANCE EXERCISE PROGRAM

A group exercise program designed to reduce falls risks in adults, increase strength and improve balance.

MEDICAL PRACTICE

Doctors offering bulk billing general practice services at Mitchell Street.

QUIT SMOKING PROGRAM

Free program to help reduce or quit smoking.

PODIATRY

Provides assessment, management and support for children, adolescents and adults with mobility and function issues, foot care and monitoring of foot health.

STRENGTH TRAINING

Providing an opportunity for older adults to complete a personalised exercise program in a supervised group. We aim to support individuals to improve or maintain strength, balance, mobility and function.

TYPE 2 DIABETES EXERCISE PROGRAM

A group program offering exercise and lifestyle support for people with Type 2 diabetes.

SEXUAL & REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH HUB

Blood borne virus (BBV) and sexually transmissible infection (STI) prevention, testing and treatment, including PrEP and PEP. Contraception education and services. Pregnancy testing, care and termination. Endometriosis and Pelvic Pain clinic. Women's health including managing periods, menopause, and cervical screening tests. Trans and gender diverse sexual health.

MEN'S HEALTH CLINIC

Annual check-ups, health assessments and referral information for men and gender diverse people.

**For appointments or more information
call: 5406 1200**

Fax for all sites: 5441 4200

PO Box 1121, Bendigo Central, Vic 3552

FORMER REFUGEES

HUMANITARIAN SETTLEMENT SERVICES PROGRAM (HSP)

Supports newly arrived humanitarian arrivals of refugee background in Australia with a range of services to address immediate needs and ongoing orientation to their new country.

REFUGEE HEALTH NURSE

Supporting service agencies to better understand and deliver health care to refugees where they live. Contact our central office.

SETTLEMENT ENGAGEMENT TRANSITION SUPPORT SERVICES (SETS)

use intake, assessment, goal plans, referrals and advocacy as cornerstones of practice. Utilising a range of engagement strategies including groups, individual and family settings the service aims to equip people with knowledge and confidence to make informed decisions and goals.

REFUGEE AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY TEAM MIGRANT AND REFUGEE HEALTH

Co-designed culturally specific health information and education opportunities to build health and wellbeing, safe sustainable living and capacity to access services.

YOUTH

HEADSPACE BENDIGO

Supports young people between the ages of 12 and 25 years who are experiencing difficulties. Phone: 5406 1400.

YOUTH COUNSELLING SERVICE

For young people under 25 years, individual sessions and support available. Includes alcohol and drug counselling.

YOUTH HEALTH SERVICES

Provides a youth friendly health service including GP's, nurses and counsellors.



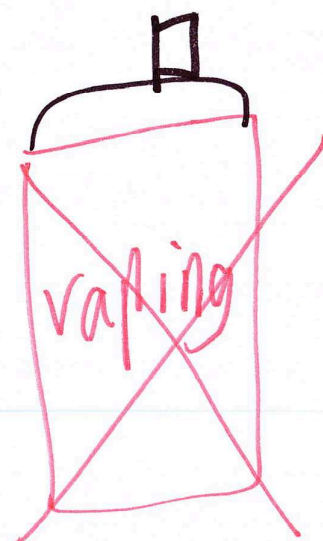
VAPING



BAD



FOR



YOU