

Truth Initiative and Surgeon General Take the Stage at The Atlantic Festival to Discuss Vaping as a Youth Mental Health Issue

Research shows nicotine can worsen symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Washington, D.C. (September 29 2021) – Truth Initiative® CEO and President Robin Koval, Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy and former vaper turned activist Daniel Ament, took to The Atlantic Festival stage during a session called [Thrive: A Youth Mental-Health Summit](#) to draw awareness to the connection between vaping and the worsening youth mental health crisis, which peer-reviewed studies indicate are interconnected. The speakers highlighted well-established research that shows nicotine both harms developing brains and can negatively effect mental health by worsening symptoms of anxiety and depression.

A recently published study in the [Journal of the American Medical Association \(JAMA\)](#) shows that youth depression and anxiety doubled during the pandemic, compared to pre-pandemic estimates. Meanwhile, youth vaping remains at epidemic levels, with 20% of high schoolers vaping, and nearly 40% of those who vape, doing so on a regular basis, which may worsen their mental and physical health.

The Surgeon General appeared on Truth Initiative’s panel segment, titled *Exposing Vaping as a Mental Health Issue*, as his seminal [2016 report on e-cigarette use among youth and young adults](#) approaches its fifth anniversary. As the first-ever federal report on youth e-cigarette use, it sounded the alarm on the uniquely damaging effects nicotine has on young people. During the discussion, Dr. Murthy commented on the association between nicotine and symptoms of depression and other mental health concerns. “Nicotine is highly addictive, it harms the developing brain, which is one of the reasons why we’re particularly concerned about it with adolescents,” said Dr. Murthy. “E-cigarettes, have sadly been yet another pathway through which young people have been exposed to nicotine-containing products. There is a growing body of science that is showing us nicotine may also impact our mental health. We all know that the pandemic has taken a real toll on our mental health and physical health and we have to do everything we can to make sure we’re bolstering our health at this time of crisis.”

The Atlantic Festival convenes the biggest names in politics, media, business, tech, and the arts to discuss the most consequential issues of our time. Underwritten by Truth Initiative, *Thrive: A Youth Mental-Health Summit* also featured Zak Williams, son of Robin Williams and a mental health advocate who recently told his compelling story in “The Me You Can’t See.” The summit also brought together advocacy groups, researchers and young people to talk about ways to find hope and solutions amid the growing youth mental health crisis.

The Atlantic Festival panel comes on the heels of “[It’s Messing with Our Heads](#)” the latest campaign from [truth®](#)—the proven-effective and nationally recognized youth smoking, vaping and nicotine prevention campaign from Truth Initiative. During the

panel discussion, Robin shared details of this effort to give young people facts about vaping. “Our organization cares deeply about the physical and mental wellbeing of our nation’s youth and young adults,” said Robin Koval, President and CEO of Truth Initiative. “COVID-19 has exacerbated mental health issues for young people and, unfortunately, the very thing many young people are turning to for relief can actually making it worse. The tobacco industry has invested significant resources to [connect tobacco with mental well-being](#) but the science is clear that vaping nicotine can amplify and worsen symptoms of anxiety and depression. Our latest **truth** campaign helps call attention to and raise awareness of nicotine’s problematic impact on young people’s mental health.”

During Truth Initiative’s discussion, Daniel told his harrowing story about how he went from being a healthy four sport varsity athlete to one of the first recipients of a double lung transplant during his junior year of high school after vaping e-cigarettes for nine months. “Most teenagers I’ve met who are still addicted to vaping know they have a problem and want to quit but do not have the mental power or enough of a reason to do so,” said Daniel who is sharing his story in hopes that it will inspire, educate and encourage others to quit, or better yet never vape in the first place, in order to avoid the harmful mental and physical effects of vaping that he has experienced first-hand.

As part of this youth vaping education and prevention effort, Truth Initiative released a white paper, [Colliding Crises: Youth Mental Health and Nicotine Use](#), which examines years of data on nicotine’s role in exacerbating mental health issues. These important data linking nicotine to mental health demonstrates the urgency to help young people quit vaping, especially in light of data showing that 90% of those who quit said they felt less stressed, anxious or depressed. Truth Initiative’s innovative youth engagement can help. More than 370,000 young people have enrolled in [This is Quitting](#) —the proven-effective, free and anonymous text message quit vaping program for teens and young adults from Truth Initiative. A [randomized clinical trial found](#) that young adults aged 18-24 who used This is Quitting had nearly 40% higher odds of quitting compared to a control group. **truth** also offers a free, comprehensive digital program curriculum, [Vaping: Know the truth](#), that gives students the facts about the health dangers of e-cigarettes and the help they need to quit. Teens and young adults can text “DITCHVAPE” to 88709 and get immediate help and those struggling with mental health or who want to learn more about quitting can access free resources at [thetruth.com](#).

More information about the impact nicotine has on mental health can be found at [TruthInitiative.org](#).

About Truth Initiative®

Truth Initiative is a national public health organization that is inspiring lives free from smoking, vaping and nicotine and building a culture where all young people reject tobacco. In 2020, we celebrated 20 years of saving lives and preventing millions of youth from smoking. Our impact has helped drive the teen smoking rate down from 23% in 2000 to 4.2% in 2020. The truth about tobacco and the tobacco industry are at the heart of our proven-effective and nationally recognized **truth**® public education campaign. **truth** has also recently taken on the youth epidemics of vaping and opioids.

Our rigorous scientific research and policy studies, community and youth engagement programs supporting populations at high risk of using tobacco and innovation in tobacco dependence treatment, are also helping to end one of the most critical public health battles of our time. Based in Washington D.C., our organization, formerly known as the American Legacy Foundation, was established and funded through the 1998 Master Settlement Agreement between attorneys general from 46 states, five U.S. territories and the tobacco industry. To learn more, visit truthinitiative.org.

About truth®

truth is the longest-running and most successful national tobacco prevention campaign for youth and young adults. The campaign delivers the facts about tobacco use and the marketing tactics of the tobacco industry so that young people can make informed choices and influence others to do the same. We are credited with preventing millions of young people from becoming smokers and are equally committed to achieving the same results in ending the youth e-cigarette epidemic, including by helping young people quit with our first-of-its-kind quit vaping program for teens and young adults This is Quitting. **truth** is part of Truth Initiative®, a national public health organization dedicated to achieving a culture where young people reject smoking, vaping, and nicotine. Learn more about **truth** and the organization behind it at thetruth.com and truthinitiative.org.