

Applying Ethical Principles to Public Health

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Cambridge Public Health Department Ethics Committee

Slide materials: credit to Jeffrey Byrnes, PhD, Associate
Professor of Philosophy

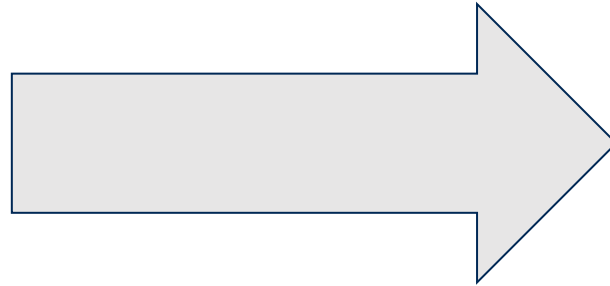


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Mentimeter: Introductory Poll

Use QR code to join



Or: go to [Menti.com](https://menti.com), code 7984 2070



Real Life Case Example: Proposition of a Nicotine Free Generation

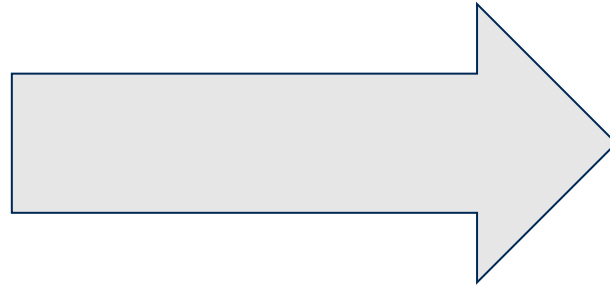
Background

- Law would ban the sale of tobacco products to everyone born on or after a certain date
- Includes all tobacco products - vape, tobacco pouches
- Brookline was first community to pass
 - 6 other communities in MA have passed a law



Mentimeter: Thoughts on tobacco use

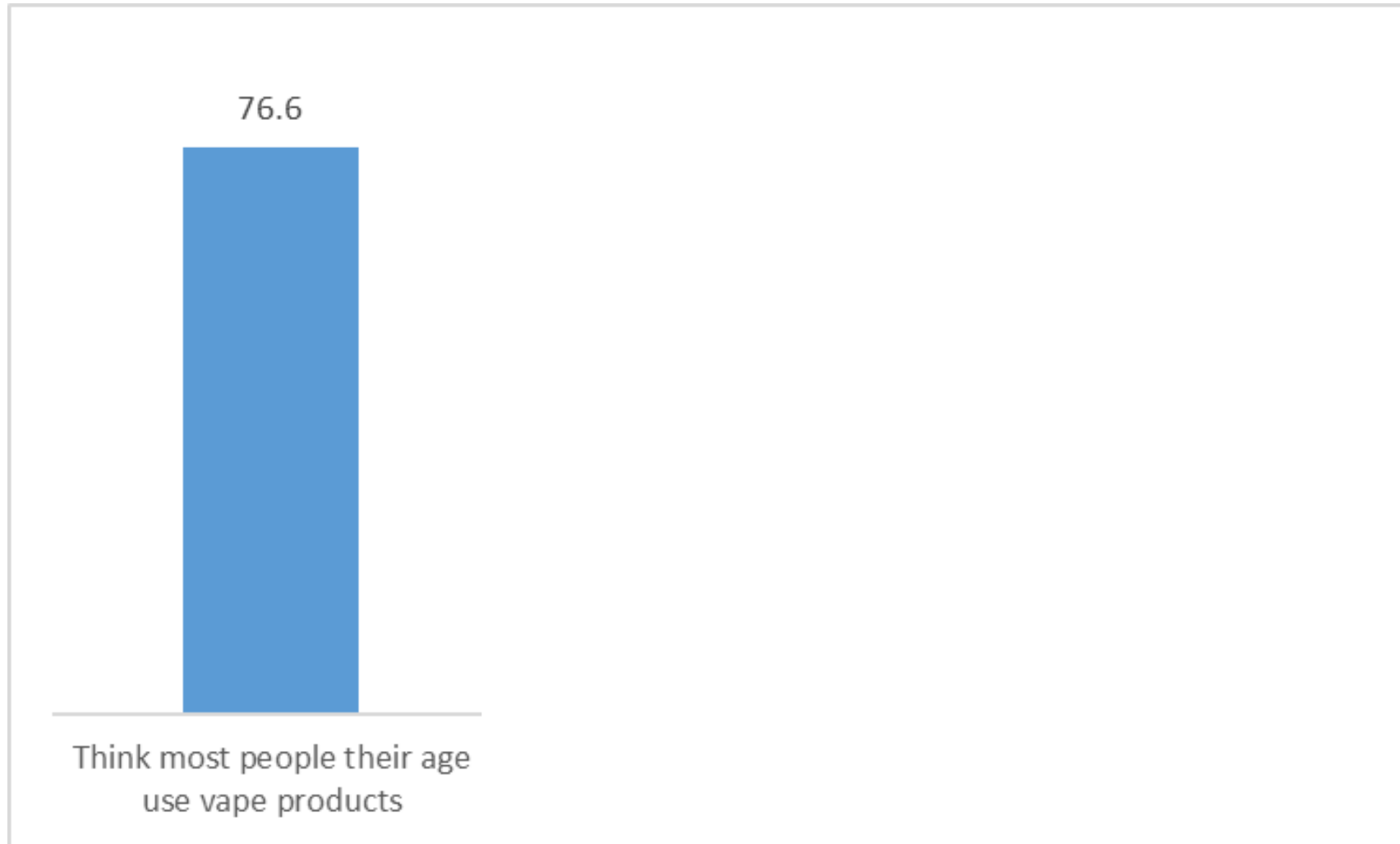
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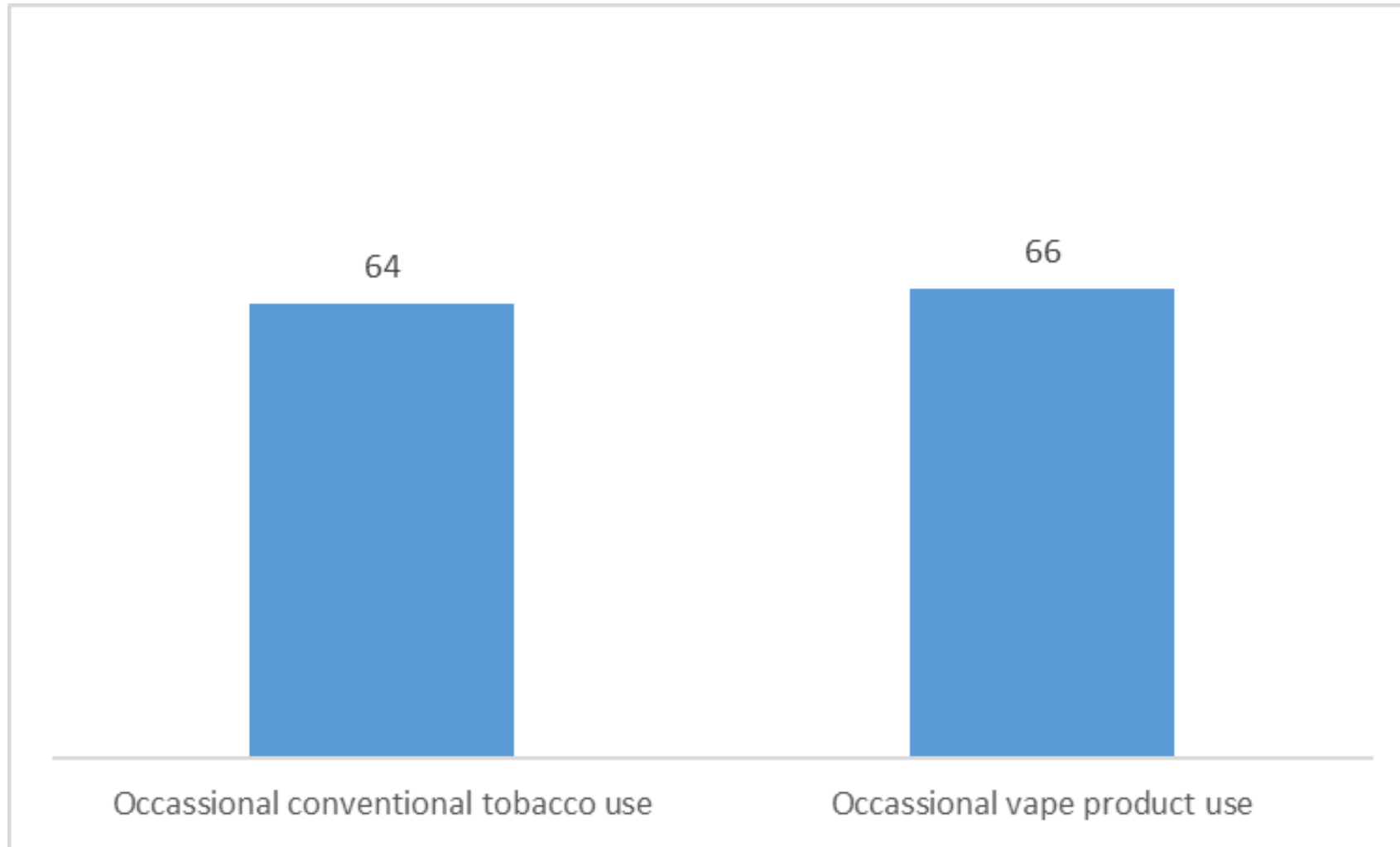
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Vape product use in MA high school students



Moderate to great perceived risk of harm



What is Ethics?



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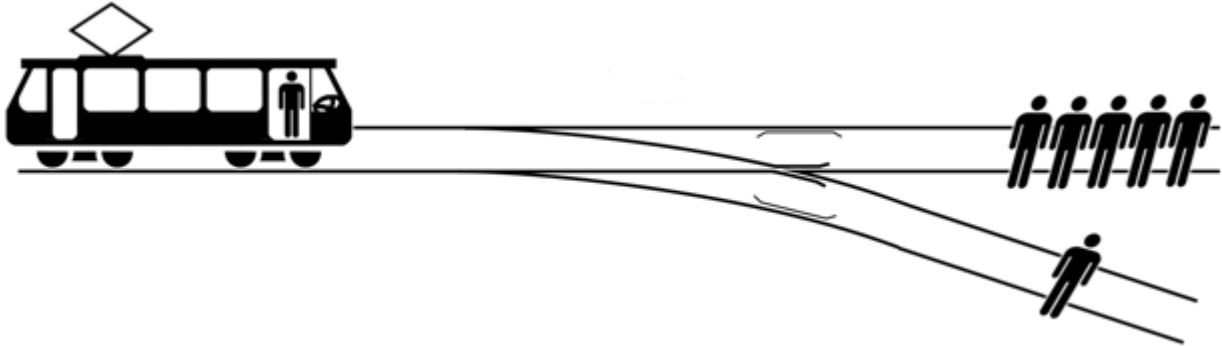
What is Ethics NOT?

- ...about opinions or feelings
 - Ethical positions have reasons
- ...the same as law
- ...necessarily religious
- ...merely a matter of majority vote, consensus, or “including more voices”
 - Many, or even most people, can be wrong
- ...something about which people always disagree



The Trolley Scenarios

1



2



Principles of Ethics

- Beneficence
- Non-maleficence
- Respect for Persons
- Justice



Beneficence

Maximize benefits



Non-maleficence

Minimize harms





Justice

- Treating like cases like and unlike cases differently
- Aiming for equity





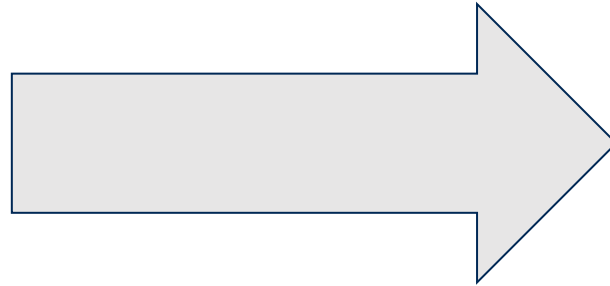
Respect for persons

**RESPECT A PERSON'S RIGHT TO
SELF-DETERMINATION
(AUTONOMY)**



Mentimeter: Ethics Principles and the NFG case

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Conflicting duties

- Public health efforts are motivated by ethical commitments.
- The individuals who carry out that work in a LHD have duties toward those ethical commitments.
- Most of the time, individuals can resolve the ethical issues they face intuitively.
- Particularly fraught cases are those where our duties come into conflict with one another.
- The role of the ethics committee is where the most complex cases can be analyzed and evaluated.



What is the Ethics Committee?

- The purpose of the Public Health Ethics Committee is first to ensure institutional space for reflecting upon what values and priorities flow out of our mission and commitments, and second to build the expertise in the Cambridge Public Health Department (CPHD) required to perform ethical reflection in the way that best supports its constituents.
- The committee will address ethical questions that arise from programs, policies, or interventions, not exclusively concerning, but with a particular eye toward matters of health and racial equity.
- Ethical analyses will focus on department policy or operations distinct from HR matters of individual or group behavior. If there is any suspected unethical behavior on the part of staff, this will be referred to the appropriate CPHD program manager or Leadership Team representative.

Members: Diverse, ideally represent all departments

Special shout out to our consultant ethicist, Jeff Byrnes !!!



Case Submission and Evaluation Process

01

Have a case to submit? The Committee will provide the form

- Template is to help extract the key ethical questions from complex issues

02

Submit the completed form to Committee Co-Chairs

- The Ethics Committee Leadership Team will evaluate the form
- Committee Leadership Team may work with you for development of the key ethical question

03

Case will be presented to the Full Committee for deliberation

- A recommendation will be provided to the submitter following the deliberative session



Other Examples

- Flexible work schedules for CPHD staff
- Rat fertility control
- Henkeeping
- Water fluoridation



What scenarios have you encountered?

- Are there any situations your health board has encountered that could benefit from analysis with an ethical lens?
- Committee not necessarily required



Thank you! Questions?



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