

Telescoping 50 years: Smoking report anniversary makes us look back—and ahead

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One of the primary purposes of anniversaries is to give us perspective, to prompt us to remember where we have been and look toward where we may go. With the 50th anniversary of the U.S. Surgeon General's Report on Smoking and Health commemorated this weekend, we have quite an outlook.

We've come a long way over the past five decades: U.S. smoking rates have been cut in half, saving 8 million lives.

That's according to a new study in the Jan. 8 special theme issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*, which explores the global prevalence of smoking, points to the promise and perils of e-cigarettes, and provides a detailed timeline of key tobacco-related events over the past century.

We sent copies of the journal to more than 50 members of Congress who have been most active on tobacco control, urging them to work toward overcoming this epidemic. We also were among signatories of a letter to the president, which calls for robust smoking prevention campaigns, enforcement of health plan requirements to cover tobacco cessation treatment and greater regulation of tobacco product manufacturing, marketing and sales.

The AMA's activity since the surgeon general's first report is considerable, including:

- 1964: Issued an official acknowledgement of the harms of smoking
- 1972: Launched a "war on smoking"
- 1995: Published a report in JAMA that revealed tobacco companies' deceptive practices to hide the dangers of smoking

- 2010: Released a report on e-cigarettes that calls for analysis and regulation by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration
- 2011: Conducted a mass transit ad campaign encouraging commuters to quit smoking

And we're continuing our work to improve the health of the nation around two common conditions for which tobacco use is a major risk factor—type 2 diabetes and heart disease. The precursors of these conditions, prediabetes and hypertension, each already affect one-third of our population.

Through the AMA's Improving Health Outcomes initiative, we are forging novel partnerships to make connections among organizations, communities and physicians to halt the progression of these troubling diseases.

Fifty years from now, I believe the next generation of physicians and patients will look back at our leadership and celebrate more victories in reducing the burden of these preventable diseases to improve the health of the nation.