

## REPORT OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

B of T Report 06-JUN-21

Subject: Annual Update on Activities and Progress in Tobacco Control: March 2020 through February 2021

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1 This report summarizes trends and news on tobacco usage, policy implications, and American  
2 Medical Association (AMA) tobacco control advocacy activities from March 2020 through  
3 February 2021. The report is written pursuant to AMA Policy D-490.983, “Annual Tobacco  
4 Report.”

### 5 6 TOBACCO USE AND COVID-19

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8 Early studies have linked certain underlying medical conditions with an increased risk for severe  
9 illness from the virus that causes COVID-19. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
10 (CDC) publish an ongoing list of conditions for which sufficient evidence indicates the conditions  
11 are likely to cause or may cause more severe outcomes in adults with COVID-19. CDC includes  
12 smoking as a condition likely to increase COVID-19 severity, which has resulted in some states  
13 such as Illinois adding current/former smokers to vaccine priority status.

14  
15 A literature review in *Respiratory Medicine* found that tobacco use in all forms, whether smoking  
16 or chewing, is significantly associated with severe COVID-19 outcomes. According to the authors,  
17 pre-existing comorbidities in tobacco users such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, respiratory  
18 diseases, and hypertension were found to further aggravate the virus making the treatment of such  
19 COVID-19 patients more challenging due to their rapid clinical deterioration. The authors  
20 conducted the literature review from August to September 2020.

### 21 22 TOBACCO USE AND HEALTH EQUITY

#### 23 24 *Study Looks at Menthol Cigarettes with a Social Justice Lens*

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26 Menthol could be exacerbating deep social inequities according to a paper published in *Nicotine &*  
27 *Tobacco Research*. Researchers at Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health and  
28 colleagues at CUNY and Rutgers School of Public Health suggest that a ban on menthol cigarettes  
29 could have monumental implications for both short- and long-term physical and mental health of  
30 communities of color. In 2009 the FDA banned cigarettes with certain flavors that appeal to  
31 children and teens such as bubblegum and chocolate. The FDA did not include menthol in that  
32 2009 action stating it would be conducting more research, which FDA completed in 2011. FDA’s  
33 scientific committee concluded that menthol in cigarettes increases initiation, facilitates  
34 progression to regular smoking, increases dependence, and decreases the likelihood of smoking  
35 cessation, especially among both youth and adult Black smokers, and as such, the removal of  
36 menthol from cigarettes would benefit public health. Overall estimates indicate that if menthol was  
37 included in the flavored cigarette ban, over 630,000 deaths would be averted, of which one of three  
38 would be a Black life. Despite the committee’s conclusions, FDA has not taken action to ban  
39 menthol.

1 Menthol has a cooling and anesthetic (or pain killing) effect. It can decrease the cough reflex and  
2 soothe the dry throat feeling that many smokers have. A study in the *American Journal of Public*  
3 *Health* found evidence that the tobacco industry was manipulating levels of menthol by promoting  
4 cigarettes with lower menthol content, which were popular with adolescents and young adults, and  
5 providing cigarettes with higher menthol content to long-term smokers. Studies have shown that  
6 the tobacco industry has targeted Black youth and adult smokers for decades resulting in lower quit  
7 rates attributable to menthol. This connection between low quit rates in Black menthol smokers  
8 was also confirmed by the FDA's own findings.

#### 9 10 *AMA Joins in Lawsuit Against FDA*

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12 The American Medical Association joined the African American Tobacco Control Leadership  
13 Council and Action on Smoking and Health as co-plaintiffs in a lawsuit against the FDA. The  
14 complaint, initially filed in June 2020, requests that the court compel the FDA to fulfill its mandate  
15 to take action on FDA's own conclusions that it would benefit the public health to add menthol to  
16 the list of prohibited characterizing flavors and therefore ban it from sale.

17  
18 In November 2020, the court denied the FDA's motion to dismiss the complaint, thus allowing the  
19 case to proceed to discovery. Following the decision, the National Medical Association was added  
20 as a plaintiff, and the FDA is currently working on a response to the citizen petition addressing  
21 their inaction on menthol to date.

#### 22 23 OTHER EFFORTS TO ADDRESS TOBACCO CONTROL

#### 24 25 *AMA Supports Increased Funding for Tobacco Control Policy and Programs*

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27 The American Medical Association called on the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Labor, Health and  
28 Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies to increase funding for the CDC Office on  
29 Smoking and Health by \$80 million. In a letter to then-subcommittee chair Senator Roy Blunt and  
30 then-ranking member Senator Patty Murray, health care organizations, medical associations and  
31 public health groups cited the rising increase in e-cigarette usage by teens and young adults and the  
32 continued toll that tobacco takes on the health of the nation.

33  
34 The letter outlined that the added funds would allow CDC to effectively respond to the youth e-  
35 cigarette epidemic, including providing more resources to state and local health departments,  
36 expand its Tips from Former Smokers® (Tips®) media campaign and strengthen efforts to assist  
37 groups disproportionately harmed by tobacco products.

#### 38 39 *USPSTF Releases Updated Recommendations for Treating Tobacco Dependence in Adults* 40 *including Pregnant Women.*

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42 To update its 2015 recommendation on smoking cessation, the USPSTF commissioned a review to  
43 evaluate the benefits and harms of primary care interventions on tobacco use cessation in adults,  
44 including pregnant persons. The updated recommendation reflects newer evidence and language in  
45 the field of tobacco cessation and includes a description of the 2019 E-cigarette or Vaping product  
46 use Associated Lung Injury, or EVALI, outbreak in the U.S. However, the recommended services  
47 that primary care clinicians should provide for tobacco cessation are the same as in 2015. The  
48 USPSTF continues to recommend that clinicians ask all adults about tobacco use, advise them to  
49 stop using tobacco, and provide behavioral interventions and FDA-approved pharmacotherapy for  
50 cessation to nonpregnant adults who use tobacco. Pregnant women should be asked about tobacco  
51 use, advised to stop using tobacco, and provided behavioral interventions for cessation. There

remains insufficient evidence to assess the balance of benefits and harms of pharmacotherapy interventions for tobacco cessation in pregnant persons.

The USPSTF concludes that the evidence on the use of e-cigarettes for tobacco smoking cessation in adults, including pregnant persons, is insufficient, and the balance of benefits and harms cannot be determined. The USPSTF identified the lack of well-designed, randomized clinical trials on e-cigarettes that report smoking abstinence or adverse events as a critical gap in the evidence. The 2020 update was published in the January 19, 2021 issue of *JAMA*.

#### *CDC's Tips® Campaign Increases Quit Rates*

Findings from a CDC study published in *Preventing Chronic Disease* show that CDC's Tips® campaign led more than 1 million U.S. adults to quit smoking and an estimated 16.4 million U.S. adults to attempt to quit smoking during 2012–2018. To assess the campaign's impact on quit attempts and sustained quits, CDC analyzed data from a nationally representative longitudinal survey of U.S. adults who smoked cigarettes during 2012–2018.

The Tips® campaign was launched in 2012 and shows real people who are living with serious long-term health effects from cigarette smoking and secondhand smoke exposure. Through the campaign, people share compelling stories about their smoking-related diseases and disabilities and the toll these conditions have taken on them. The campaign also features nonsmokers who experienced life-threatening episodes because of exposure to secondhand smoke and family members affected by their loved one's smoking-related illness.

The 2020 U.S. Surgeon General's Report on Smoking Cessation cites studies showing that emotionally evocative, evidence-based campaigns like Tips® are effective in raising awareness about the dangers of smoking and helping people who smoke to quit.

#### TOBACCO USE SURVEILLANCE

##### *CDC Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Reports (MMWR)*

Cigarette smoking is responsible for more than 480,000 deaths per year in the United States, including more than 41,000 deaths resulting from secondhand smoke exposure. From March 2020 through February 2021, the CDC released eight MMWRs related to tobacco use. These reports provide useful data that researchers, health department, community organizations and others use to assess and develop ongoing evidence-based programs, policies, and interventions to eliminate and/or prevent the economic and social costs of tobacco use including electronic cigarettes.

##### *Monitoring E-cigarette Usage Among Teens to Identify Strategic Control Policies*

The September 18, 2020, and October 23, 2020, MMWR both highlighted e-cigarette use among youth, emphasizing the increased popularity of "pod mods," which are products with a prefilled or refillable pod cartridge (pod) and a modifiable (mod) system. According to the report in the September 18 MMWR, e-cigarettes have been the most used tobacco product among U.S. youths since 2014 with 27.5% of high school students reporting current e-cigarette use in 2019. To assess trends in unit sales of e-cigarettes in the U.S. by product and flavor type, the CDC, the CDC Foundation, and Truth Initiative analyzed retail scanner data. By product type, the proportion of total sales that were prefilled cartridge products increased from 47.5% to 89.4% during September 2014–August 2019. The authors of the October 23 MMWR study noticed that the rise in pod mods coincided with the increased usage of e-cigarettes by youth. The popularity of the pod mods is due

1 in part to the e-cigarette industry marketing the use of nicotine salts instead of freebase nicotine.  
2 Freebase nicotine is used in most other e-cigarette cartridges, or vaping, products and conventional  
3 tobacco products (e.g., cigarettes). According to the study, nicotine salts, which have a lower pH  
4 than freebase nicotine, allow particularly high levels of nicotine to be inhaled more easily and with  
5 less irritation to the throat than freebase nicotine. The most commonly sold pod mod brand is  
6 JUUL, which accounted for 75% of all U.S. e-cigarettes sales by the end of 2018. A majority  
7 (59.1%) of U.S. high school student e-cigarette users report JUUL is their usual brand.  
8

9 Continued monitoring of e-cigarette sales and use is critical to inform strategies to minimize risks.  
10 As part of a comprehensive approach, such strategies could include those that address product  
11 innovations and flavors that appeal to youth.  
12

13 *Prevalence and Trends in Cigarette Smoking Among Adults with Epilepsy - United States, 2010–*  
14 *2017.*  
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16 Studies have shown that cigarette smoking is as common, and sometimes more so, among adults  
17 with a history of epilepsy compared with those without a history of epilepsy. According to the  
18 prevalence report in the November 27, 2020 MMWR, citing the latest available data, from 2010–  
19 2017, one in four adults with active or inactive epilepsy were current smokers, compared with one  
20 in six persons without epilepsy. Compared with adults without epilepsy, adults with epilepsy report  
21 lower household income, more unemployment and disability, worse psychological health, and  
22 reduced health-related quality of life. This report is the first assessment of smoking trends in people  
23 with epilepsy. While cigarette smoking declined significantly among adults without a history of  
24 epilepsy, from 19.3% in 2010 to 14.0% in 2017, declines in current cigarette smoking among adults  
25 with active epilepsy were not statistically significant (from 26.4% to 21.8%). This lack of a  
26 significant decrease in people with epilepsy provides an intervention opportunity. Health and social  
27 service providers who interact with persons with active epilepsy should ensure that smoking  
28 cessation information and resources are available to them.