



Tobacco Use Prevention

Tobacco use is the leading preventable cause of disease, disability and death in the United States. People exposed to second-hand smoke are at risk for negative health effects such as cancer, heart disease and respiratory disease. In addition, tobacco use exacts an exorbitant financial toll nationwide. Nearly \$100 billion in health care expenditures and another \$100 billion in productivity losses can be attributed to smoking or other tobacco use each year.

As with most health behaviors, tobacco use is influenced by social and psychological factors. To reduce the level of tobacco consumption overall, tobacco control strategies often range from individual, public policy and environmental approaches. Some approaches may put greater emphasis on tobacco use cessation, while others put greater emphasis on reducing the number of people who begin smoking in the first place. Both are important approaches in addressing the burden of tobacco use and its consequences.

Individual Approaches

Education – Because 90% of adults who smoke began using tobacco before the age of 18, most prevention-oriented educational campaigns are targeted toward youth. School-based programs, in particular, may be effective in preventing tobacco use and addiction among teens and younger children. These programs stress the benefits of a nonsmoking lifestyle and help youth recognize social influences that encourage them to smoke.

Policy and Media Approaches

Smoke-free policies – prohibit smoking in workplaces and/or other public spaces. These laws help protect people who don't smoke from the effects of secondhand smoke but may also deter tobacco use initiation.

Tobacco tax increases – largely affect younger populations that typically have less disposable income than adults. Increases in cigarette prices not only prevent new users but motivate people who smoke to seek cessation resources.

Youth access restrictions – are often centered on cigarette purchase points and retailers. These may include tighter restrictions on tobacco product sales, active enforcement of these restrictions and retailer education.

Mass media campaigns – may be partially or wholly directed at a specific segment of the population with anti-tobacco messaging. Recent campaigns have focused on tobacco industry marketing.

Comprehensive approaches that combine multiple strategies and address different influences on tobacco use behavior may be most effective in preventing youth from initiating tobacco use. For example, a school-based education program can be enhanced by smoke-free policies which prohibit anyone, including faculty and staff, from smoking on campus. Additionally, these campaigns contain parental messaging conveyed via mailings, meetings and mass media throughout the community.