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Surgeon general: Not enough doctors advise patients to quit smoking

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Too few healthcare professionals are giving their patients advice to quit smoking, according to the U.S. surgeon general on Thursday in the first report on smoking cessation in 30 years.

The [report](#) found 44% of adult smokers didn't receive smoking-cessation advice from their clinician over the course of a year, despite 84% reporting they saw a physician or other health professional during that same period.

The findings were based on 2015 data from the National Health Interview Survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [National Center of Health Statistics](#).

"Smoking is the number one preventable cause of death, disease and disability in the United States each year, so why are 40% of our health providers out there not advising smokers to quit," U.S. Surgeon General Jerome Adams said at a news conference held Thursday.

The number of Americans who smoke cigarettes is at an all-time low, dropping from its peak of 42% in 1964 to 13.7% in 2018. But approximately 34 million adults in the U.S. still smoke cigarettes.

Behavioral counseling and Food and Drug Administration-approved cessation medications have proven to improve patients' success at quitting smoking.

But Adams said considerable disparities exist that make it more difficult for more vulnerable groups to get the kind of support they need.

"It's easy for me, who lives in the suburbs, to think that no one smokes anymore — when I look around, I don't see anyone smoking, and we're at historically low numbers," Adams said. "But the fact is many groups have been left behind by the progress we've made over the last several decades."

Black adult smokers were more likely to attempt to quit smoking than white adults, but they were less successful, according to the report. White adults

were more likely to receive advice from a healthcare professional to quit smoking compared to black, Asian and Hispanic adults, and were more likely to have used behavioral counseling and smoking-cessation medications.

Approximately 66% of Medicare beneficiaries received tobacco cessation advice from their healthcare provider compared to 59% of adults covered by Medicaid, 57% covered by private insurance, and 44% of uninsured adults.

The report didn't take a stand on whether e-cigarettes were a viable tool to help people quit smoking, as many users have claimed. It found the evidence was still inadequate to say e-cigarette increased smoking cessation.

But Adams acknowledged anecdotal claims made by e-cigarette users who have contended the devices have been an essential tool in helping them quit tobacco cigarettes.

Matthew L. Myers, president of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, said the report had important implications for public policies for e-cigarette devices as the Trump administration has considered a [ban](#) on most flavored e-cigarettes.

"This report is a timely reminder that effective and overdue FDA regulation of e-cigarettes is critical in order to prevent e-cigarettes from addicting a new generation of kids and to assist smokers by determining which, if any, e-cigarette products are effective at helping smokers quit," Myers said in a statement.