Tobacco Control and Prevention

Summary of Policy Monograph Approved by the ACP Board of Regents, April 2010

What Does Tobacco Control and Prevention Involve?

Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death and disease in the United States. While significant progress has been made over the last 50 years to reduce tobacco use, it remains a daunting problem. Twenty-one percent of adults currently smoke cigarettes, and 20% of high school students report having smoked cigarettes in the past 30 days. Therefore, it remains important that stakeholders aggressively work to reduce tobacco use rates. Doing so will ensure that a new generation does not succumb to a lifetime of harmful addiction, disease, and untimely death.

The tobacco problem cannot be curbed by piecemeal action. Effective tobacco control occurs when a concerted effort is made to establish and financially maintain comprehensive tobacco control initiatives by increasing tobacco excise taxes, prohibiting smoking in public places, preventing tobacco use among young people, facilitating smoking cessation programs, and banning tobacco additives such as menthol flavoring. In 2009, the FDA was given the authority to regulate tobacco products. This important step signals promise that tobacco use can be greatly reduced, but regulation alone is not sufficient.

Why is Controlling and Preventing the Use of Tobacco Important?

Though anti-tobacco use efforts have been remarkably successful, tobacco use remains high. Each year, cigarette smoking is the cause of over 440,000 deaths, nearly 50,000 of which are attributed to exposure to secondhand smoke. The 2004 Surgeon General's report concluded that smoking affects nearly every organ in the human body. Tobacco and its smoke contain over 4,000 chemicals, including 60 known carcinogens.

Further, tobacco users are not the only individuals exposed to the harmful effects of smoking. Tens of thousands of nonsmoking Americans die each year from illness attributed to secondhand smoke. Smoking also has a harmful effect on the nation's economy and health care system due to such factors as lost worker productivity, increased medical costs, health effects of smoking during pregnancy, and smoking-related fires.

Key Findings and Recommendations from the Paper

ACP recommends the following:
- All states, with assistance from the federal government, should establish and adequately fund comprehensive tobacco control efforts to prevent smoking and other tobacco product use among young people; provide objective information about the dangers of cigarette, cigar, pipe, smokeless, and other tobacco products, minimize exposure to secondhand smoke; and help tobacco users quit.
- Public and private insurers, as well as state, community, and employer-based entities, should provide effective comprehensive tobacco cessation and treatment benefits –

including counseling and medication – to all qualifying individuals. Physicians should help their patients quit.

- All states should commit to funding tobacco control efforts at CDC-recommended levels. All states should establish requirements that an appropriate portion of tobacco-generated revenue be directed toward tobacco control efforts. Local governments should be permitted to implement tobacco excise taxes beyond state levels.
- Youth tobacco education and prevention efforts, such as antismoking media campaigns and school-based interventions, must be enhanced and properly funded. Information and interventions related to cigars, pipes, smokeless tobaccos, and other cigarette alternatives should be incorporated into youth and antismoking efforts.
- The FDA should implement a ban on menthol flavoring in all tobacco products, as it has done with other flavors in cigarettes.
- State and local governments should take necessary action to establish comprehensive smoke-free laws banning smoking in all nonresidential indoor areas, including workplaces, restaurants, and bars. State and local governments should work to control smoking in residential areas, such as apartment and condominium buildings.
- Comprehensive tobacco control efforts should seek to reduce use of cigars and pipes in addition to cigarettes, particularly among young people and cigarette smokers.
- The FDA should be authorized to regulate electronic cigarettes until convincing evidence develops that they are not addictive or harmful.
- Smoking and tobacco use in movies and television should be discouraged, and the media industry should take responsibility to emphasize the dangers of tobacco use, particularly to young people.

For More Information

This issue brief is a summary of *Tobacco Control and Prevention*. The full paper is available at http://www.acponline.org/pressroom/control_tobacco.pdf.