

COMBAT YOUTH SMOKING BY RAISING THE SMOKING AGE TO 21



Office of the
Attorney General

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OBJECTIVE

Increase the sale age of tobacco products to 21 to save lives, reduce health care costs, and prevent nicotine addiction among Washington youth and young adults.

PROBLEM

Smoking is the number one cause of preventable death in the United States, killing 8,300 Washingtonians every year. If we do nothing, an estimated 104,000 of today's Washington youths will die prematurely from smoking.

Smoking generates huge health care costs that impact Washington taxpayers. Every year, \$2.81 billion in health care costs can be directly attributed to tobacco use in Washington. The negative health effects of tobacco cost each Washington household an extra \$819 in state and federal taxes — every year.

Adolescent brains are particularly susceptible to the harmful effects of nicotine and nicotine addiction, as the decision making, impulse control, and sensation seeking parts of the brain are still developing. 95% of smokers begin smoking before age 21, and 18- and 21-year-olds are a key cohort for becoming hooked.

EFFECTIVE SOLUTION

An RJ Reynolds researcher once declared that “if a person has not smoked by the time they turn 21, the odds are ‘20-to-1’ they never will.”

In 2015, the Institute of Medicine concluded that increasing the tobacco sale age to 21 will save lives.

In its report, requested by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, IOM estimates that if the tobacco sale age were raised to 21 nationwide, children born between 2000 and 2019 would suffer:

- 249,000 fewer premature deaths,
- 45,000 fewer deaths from lung cancer, and
- 4.2 million fewer years of lost life.

Today, more than 90 localities in 8 states have raised the tobacco sale age to 21, and the strategy is working. In 2005, Needham, Massachusetts was the first jurisdiction to raise its tobacco sale age to 21. The effect was powerful. Youth smoking decreased by more than 50% - **nearly triple** what occurred in surrounding communities – and no convenience stores went out of business. In June 2015, Hawaii became the first state to raise the tobacco sale age to 21.

Raising the tobacco sale age to 21 would be particularly effective with 15-17-year-olds ¹ who rely on older peers for tobacco access. Nationally, more than twice as many youth smokers get their cigarettes from social sources than from a store or vending machine, and 41 % of Washington 10th graders say it is “sort of easy” to “very easy” to get cigarettes.

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SUPPORT

PRIME SPONSORS

- Sen. Miloscia
- Rep. Orwall

ORGANIZATIONS

- Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids
- American Cancer Society
- Cancer Action Network
- American Heart Association
- American Lung Association
- American Academy of Pediatrics

NEWS PUBLICATIONS

- The Seattle Times
- Everett Herald
- Tacoma News Tribune
- The Bellingham Herald
- The Spokesman-Review
- The Olympian
- The Columbian
- Issaquah Press
- The SnoValley Star News
- Mercer Island Reporter
- Northwest Asian Weekly

1. IOM Study – 25% reduction in initiation rates

2016 LEGISLATIVE SESSION: ATTORNEY GENERAL REQUEST LEGISLATION

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Reducing youth smoking will lead fewer cases of cancers, heart disease, and other tobacco-related illnesses in the long term, and will immediately improve the health of adolescents, young adults, young mothers, and their children – from fewer hospitalizations to fewer incidents of sudden infant death and a reduction in secondhand smoke impacts.

LEGISLATION (HB 2313 / SB 6157)

HB 2313 and SB 6157 will raise the sale age to 21 for tobacco and vapor products.