

# Objective 4: Prevent Youth and Young Adults from Initiating Commercial Tobacco Use and Empower Them as Advocates

The tobacco industry targets young people, knowing that many who become addicted will be customers for life.<sup>20</sup> They introduce new products and kid-friendly flavors that mask tobacco's harsh taste and use social media marketing that paints a false picture of tobacco use.<sup>21</sup> However, experience has shown that young people play important roles in countering the tobacco industry and help to feed a pipeline of future public health advocates and researchers with impactful roles in tobacco and cannabis control.

## Key Concepts:

- New tobacco products such as e-cigarettes and other emerging products make it easier than ever for young people to use tobacco, even in school settings.
- Nicotine has been shown to change the chemistry in teenager's brains and affects attention, learning, and memory.<sup>22, 23</sup>
- California's youth and young adults can be active participants in the fight against tobacco.

## Key Themes

- Address industry tactics to market to youth and make it harder for youth to purchase tobacco.
- Educate youth and young adults on the dangers of tobacco and cannabis use.
- Empower youth in tobacco and cannabis control.



# Strategies

## Policy

- Increase the price of tobacco products and eliminate free samples and discounts.
- Eliminate online sales of all tobacco products to youth.
- Impose zoning restrictions on tobacco and cannabis retail outlets near schools and other youth-oriented facilities.
- Limit tobacco and cannabis brand placement and paid promotion in movies, streaming media, and video games.
- Replace possession, use and purchase (PUP) laws, which can negatively impact youth, with retailer-focused policies.
- Propose alternatives to suspension for youth who possess or use tobacco on campus.
- Extend coverage of tobacco-free campus policies to all colleges and universities.

The tobacco industry has a long history of promoting smoking and tobacco use on TV and movie screens, and smoking behaviors in the movies are mirrored by young audiences. Several strategies exist to help reduce youth exposure to tobacco in the movies:

1. Rate future movies and TV shows with smoking R or TV-MA, unless they exclusively depict tobacco use by actual, historical people who used tobacco (as in a biographical drama or documentary) or depict the real health consequences of tobacco/nicotine use.
2. Require strong tobacco public service announcements before any film or TV episode with smoking, regardless of genre or age-classification.
3. Require certification of no tobacco company pay-offs from each credited producer of a film or TV show with smoking.
4. Keep tobacco branding out of all future films or TV shows, regardless of genre or age-classification.
5. Make any media production with tobacco/nicotine content ineligible for public subsidies, such as tax credits and production rebates.

## Education

- Encourage schools and universities to engage students in on-campus advocacy, including production of signage, peer-to-peer training, and cessation counseling.
- Make sure that Tobacco-Use Prevention Education (TUPE) programs are open to all, and track progress involving youth from priority populations.
- Provide education on why tobacco and cannabis use should not be included in/glamorized and promoted through media, including movies, social media, advertisements, music videos, and video games.
- Continuously update school curriculum on tobacco prevention to address the changing landscape of tobacco and cannabis products.

## Research

- Track and monitor tobacco-free campus policies to find out which are most effective and what methods work best in implementing them.
- Conduct research on youth and young adult attitudes toward, behaviors related to, and experience with tobacco and cannabis products, as part of ongoing surveillance.
- Explore ways to increase parental engagement and school participation to help children make healthy choices concerning tobacco and cannabis.
- Investigate effective, culturally tailored strategies for increasing young people's use of cessation services such as Kick It California and novel cessation technologies.
- Encourage research on effective, culturally tailored cessation strategies for youth.

## Action

- Enforce existing sales-to-minors laws to ensure that minors do not have access to tobacco or cannabis products.
- Make sure tobacco prevention and cessation resources are available to all young people, regardless of economic status, geographic location, or other potential barriers.
- Provide focused outreach from credible messengers (i.e., people with experiences that vulnerable youth can relate to) who can reach out to vulnerable youth and find effective ways to engage with them.
- Help K-12 schools, trade schools, colleges and universities follow best practices in their tobacco-free policies and comply with state laws requiring tobacco-free public schools.
- Provide educational programs to schools that support student and parental buy-in and emphasize counseling rather than harsh penalties for students with no exemptions.



## Partnerships

- Encourage local health departments, school districts, and community-based organizations to work together on joint action plans to prevent young people from initiating tobacco use.
- Partner with school-based researchers to improve youth outreach and find ways to increase awareness of cessation resources.
- Work with organizations offering peer-to-peer mentoring and programs addressing other high-risk youth behaviors.

## Funding

- Provide additional funding for cessation and mental health services for youth and young adults.
- Allocate funding for robust tobacco and cannabis curriculums and educational programs.
- Fund programs to empower youth to take a meaningful role in tobacco and cannabis control.