

American Academy
of Pediatrics



DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™



American
Heart
Association.



April 30, 2019

The Honorable Diana DeGette
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chris Stewart
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative DeGette and Representative Stewart:

We are writing to express our support for the Tobacco to 21 Act, a bill that would make it unlawful for manufacturers, retailers, or other commercial entities to sell or distribute a tobacco product to anyone under the age of 21. Your bill would reduce the number of young people who use and become addicted to tobacco products and, ultimately, help to reduce the addiction, disease and premature death that these products cause.

Tobacco products remain the leading cause of preventable death in the United States and are responsible for approximately \$170 billion in health care costs each year. Tobacco use almost always begins during adolescence and young adulthood. About 95 percent of adult smokers began smoking before they turned 21. In the United States, 2,000 kids try smoking for the first time each day. If current trends continue, 5.6 million of today's youth will die prematurely from a smoking-related illness.

The past year has shown a dramatic increase in youth use of e-cigarettes. Between 2017 and 2018, e-cigarette use increased by 78 percent among high school students (to 20.8 percent) and by 48 percent among middle school students (to 4.9 percent). In 2018, more than 3.6 million middle and high school students were e-cigarette users – an alarming increase of 1.5 million students in just one year.

In 2015, the National Academy of Medicine concluded that increasing the tobacco sale age would, over time, reduce the number of adolescents and young adults who start smoking; reduce smoking-caused deaths; and immediately improve the health of adolescents, young adults and young mothers who would be deterred from smoking, as well as their children. The greatest impact would be among adolescents age 15 to 17, who would no longer be able to pass for legal age and would have a harder time obtaining cigarettes from their older friends and classmates.

Increasing the tobacco sale age to 21 will also help counter the tobacco industry's efforts to target young people between the ages of 18 and 21, a critical time when many move from experimenting with tobacco to regular smoking.

Increasing the tobacco sale age to 21 also has broad public support and is being adopted throughout the country. A 2015 survey by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that 75 percent of adults support increasing the minimum age for sale of tobacco products to 21, including 7 in 10 smokers. 12 states and more than 110 localities in an additional 15 states have increased the minimum legal tobacco sale age to 21.

We applaud your leadership in introducing a bill, free of special-interest provisions, that is an important step towards reducing the number of young people who start on a path that too often leads to addiction, disease, and premature death.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Pediatrics

American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network

American Heart Association

American Lung Association

Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids