

## Tobacco 21 Information Sheet

National data show that about 95% of adults who smoke started before they turned 21. The 18-21 age range is a time when many people who smoke transition to regular use of cigarettes – about 80% of adults who smoke became daily smokers before 21. If the legal age to purchase tobacco were raised to 21 years old nationally, there would be a 12% decrease in overall smoking prevalence (Institutes of Medicine). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Institutes of Medicine recommend raising the age as a critical component of comprehensive tobacco control policies as a low-cost strategy to protect youth from initiating with tobacco and other substances.

### Tobacco use is the number one preventable cause of death

- Tobacco use is the foremost preventable cause of death in the U.S., responsible for approximately 480,000 deaths a year and 20.8 million premature deaths over the past 50 years since the first Surgeon General’s report on smoking in 1964.
- Tobacco use continues to be the leading preventable cause of death in Vermont, claiming approximately 1,000 lives a year ([2016 Surgeon General’s Report](#)).
- Tobacco use costs Vermont \$348 million annually in healthcare costs.

### Vermont youth perceive that it is very easy to get cigarettes

- **32%** of Vermont’s high school students believe that it is very easy to get cigarettes. When 18-year-olds are excluded, **26%** believe that it is very easy to get cigarettes.
- Young adults, especially those aged 18-20 who are still in high school, are a common source of tobacco for youth under 18.
- Half of adult smokers become regular smokers before the age of 18 and four out of five become regular users before 21.

### Raising the age to purchase tobacco to 21 year olds is a recommended by the Institutes of Medicine and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

- Increasing the minimum age to purchase tobacco is a recognized, evidence-based strategy for reducing youth access and use and counteracting premature death. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention regularly supports and monitors state tobacco programs for their efforts to educate on this policy.
- Age 21 or older has been an established strategy for counteracting access and use of tobacco among youth and young adults.
- Raising the age reduces access not only for 18-20 year olds, but also to their younger peers who often get tobacco products from 18-20 year olds. If passed nationwide it would, over time, lead to a 12% decrease in smoking prevalence.
  - A 2015 Institute of Medicine report concludes that raising the minimum legal sales age for tobacco products nationwide will reduce tobacco initiation, particularly among adolescents aged 15 to 17, and improve health across the lifespan and save lives.

Promising results of tobacco 21 as part of comprehensive prevention approach to reduce tobacco use from states and municipalities (as reported by the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids)

- California passed T21 in June 2016. Initial evaluation results indicate nearly all retailers (98%) were aware of the new law seven months after its effective date. Tobacco purchase data show a significant decline in tobacco sales to younger teens following implementation of the law.
- In August of 2014, New York City implemented policies to raise the tobacco sale age to 21. Preliminary findings suggest that the law is contributing to reductions in youth tobacco use. Data show that there was 29 percent decline in current cigarette smoking among high school students between 2013 and 2015. There were also reductions in ever trying cigarettes (-18%) and smoking initiation in the past 12 months (-13%).
- In July 2016, Chicago implemented T21. Data from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey show 6% of Chicago high school students reported current cigarette smoking in 2017, an all-time low and a 56% decrease in cigarette smoking among youth since 2011. Chicago's annual Healthy Chicago survey found that current smoking of cigarettes and e-cigarettes among 18-20 year olds declined by over one third between 2015 and 2016, from 15.2% to 9.7%.

New England states and other states are passing T21 to reduce youth access and prevent addiction

- 6 states have passed T21 legislation: Maine, Massachusetts, Hawaii, California, Oregon, and New Jersey. Numerous states including Connecticut, New Hampshire and New York have pending legislation.

Military actions to address and reduce tobacco use

- The nation's military has passed policies to protect its troops from the harmful impacts of tobacco use and increase the likelihood that both recruits and personnel are better able to pass physical exams and to serve. The military has:
  - Stopped selling discounted tobacco
  - Created tobacco-free grounds on all Department of Defense bases unless designated as smoking areas
  - Air Force restricts use on installations and in cars
  - The Navy banned use of e-cigarettes on all fleets and smoking on submarines
- In 2016, the Vermont National Guard's leadership testified that it would voluntarily comply with a Vermont Tobacco 21 law.