



Support for Increasing Vermont's Tobacco Tax to Support Youth Mental Health

The Coalition for Tobacco Free Vermont, along with the undersigned organizations, strongly support increasing the state's cigarette tax by at least \$1.00 per pack, with equivalent increases across all other tobacco products. Raising the tax is the single, most effective way to prevent youth from using tobacco products, motivate current smokers to quit, and raise the necessary revenue to provide dedicated funding for youth mental health services.

Our kids are struggling with two health crises: a mental health crisis and a tobacco use epidemic. Both crises intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic and recent Vermont data shows many young people continue to report anxiety and depression while continuing to struggle with the use of highly-addictive nicotine products.

The [2023 Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey \(YRBS\)](#) shows 34% of Vermont high school students and 25% of Vermont middle school students struggle with poor mental health.

This data also shows 18% of Vermont high school students report regular use of any tobacco product, with 19% of Vermont high school 12th graders saying they regularly use e-cigarettes.

But it's not just Vermont youth who are struggling with tobacco use. 26% of adult Vermonters who live below [250% of the federal poverty level](#) currently smoke or use some form of tobacco, which is over three times the rate of Vermonters with higher income.

In fact, [Vermont spends \\$404 million](#) in annual tobacco-related health care costs, with \$94 million in VT Medicaid costs. That's \$1,072 per household in state and federal tax burden from smoking-caused government expenditures.

Evidence shows that significant tobacco tax increases result in higher quit rates and reduced health disparities among low-income tobacco users. As a result, low-income populations disproportionately reap the health and financial benefits of reduced smoking.

Reduced consumption leads to better public health and higher economic prosperity when the high cost of cancer, heart disease, lung disease, and other tobacco related health impacts are considered.

The Vermont Department of Health estimates that reducing smoking among Medicaid-insured Vermonters saves the state millions in Medicaid spending each year. Specifically, a 2% decline in smoking between 2017 and 2018 alone saved \$12 million in Medicaid spending. A further 1% decrease in smoking between 2018 and 2021 resulted in an estimated [\\$2.3 million savings in 2022](#).

The health benefits are clear. According to the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, increasing Vermont's tax to \$4.08 a pack could reduce smoking rates by up to 7.1% and help about 1,300 Vermont adults quit. That means hundreds of lives saved every year—300 fewer premature deaths, many from preventable heart attacks.

Furthermore, dedicating the estimated \$9.7 million in revenue generated from this tax increase to youth mental health programs will address a critical and growing need. Investing in prevention, early intervention, and treatment services can significantly improve outcomes and build stronger communities.

This is a chance to do what's right—protect public health, mental health and support our schools. Therefore, we urge you to support a \$1.00 increase in the tobacco tax with a dedicated allocation to youth mental health programs. This measure will not only reduce tobacco use but also provide vital funding for essential mental health services, creating a healthier future for our youth.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Pediatrics Vermont Chapter
American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network
American Heart Association
Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids
Coalition for a Tobacco Free Vermont
Family Center of Washington County
Flavors Hooks Kids Vermont
Lamoille Family Center
Milton Family Community Center
Northern New England American College of Cardiology
Precious Little Sleep LLC
Rutland County Parent Child Center
South Burlington High School
Springfield Area Parent Child Center
Sunrise Family Resource Center
The Collaborative
Vermont Academy of Family Physicians
Vermont Low Income Advocacy Council
Vermont Medical Society
Vermont Moms
Vermont Parent Child Center Network
Vermont Principals' Association
Vermont Psychiatric Association
Vermont State School Nurses' Association