

Impact of Menthol on Tobacco Disparities in the LGBTQ+ Community

August 2, 2022

Dear Food & Drug Administration,

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, menthol continues to widen tobacco health disparities for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) communities.¹ Tobacco use causes cancer, heart disease, stroke, lung diseases, diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and accelerates HIV-related co-morbidities, an additional health burden the LGBTQ+ population can ill afford.

Many groups that intersect with LGBTQ+ communities also experience the disproportionate burden of tobacco use, particularly: African Americans, Latinxs, Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, Native Americans and Alaskan Natives, people in non-urban areas, people with lower socio-economic statuses, and those with behavioral health conditions.

The accessibility of menthol cigarettes and other menthol-containing tobacco products results in disproportionate harm in all these populations. Studies show that LGBTQ+ people are more likely to try their first cigarette before age 13.² Menthol is a key initiating product for LGBTQ+ people and makes cessation harder.³ In short, menthol makes it easier for LGBTQ+ and communities of color to start smoking and harder for us all to quit. To help end tobacco disparities and minimize tobacco-related harm, access to menthol products must end.

We urge the FDA to move forward with ending the sale, production, and distribution of menthol-flavored tobacco products. We applaud the FDA for ensuring this policy targets the producers and distributors only and in no way sets up any user penalties. We join the many organizations and tobacco control leaders across the country that have led efforts to bring about this policy. We have all taken up this charge because of the direct impacts that menthol has had on our communities; to ignore our calls for this policy would represent a failure to protect the health of both communities of color and the overlapping LGBTQ+ communities.

Lead Signers:

Center for Black Equity

Center for Black Health & Equity

National Black Justice Coalition

National LGBT Cancer Network

Organization Signers:

Action on Smoking and Health

Advocates for Youth

African American Tobacco Control Leadership Council

AIDS Foundation Chicago

Alameda County Tobacco Control Coalition

AllianceQ - Disciples LGBTQ+ Alliance

American Trans Resource Hub

Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights

APNH: A Place to Nourish your Health, Inc.

Asian Pacific Partners for Empowerment, Advocacy, and Leadership (APPEAL)

Association for Nonsmokers-MN

Borderland Rainbow Center

Bradbury-Sullivan LGBT Community Center

Cal Voices

Callen-Lorde Community Health Center

Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids

CARES of Southwest Michigan

Cascade AIDS Project & Prism Health

Center for Culture, Sexuality, and Spirituality LLC

Center for LGBTQ Economic Advancement & Research (CLEAR)

CenterLink: The Community of LGBT Centers

Center on Halsted

Chase Brexton

City of Milwaukee Tobacco-Free Alliance

Compass LGBTQ Community Center

DAP Health

DBGM, Inc.

Deaf Queer Resource Center

Equality California

Erie Gay News

Fair Wisconsin

Fenway Health

Florida Social Justice Project

FUNDACION LATINOAMERICANA DE ACCION SOCIAL, INC. (FLAS)

Garden State Equality

Gay City: Seattle's LGBTQ+ Center

Gay Elder Circle

GenderNexus

Georgia Equality

GLAAD

GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBTQ Equality

Global Healthy Living Foundation

Grand Rapids Pride Center

Guilford Green Foundation & LGBTQ Center

H.E.A.R.T. Coalition

Howard Brown Health

Hudson Pride Center

Imperial Valley LGBT Resource Center

Lancaster LGBTQ+ Coalition

LBGT PA caucus

LGBT Community Center of Greater Cleveland

Lincoln Park Children and Families Collaborative

Mashup!

Mass. Trans Political Coalition

Mazzoni Center

National Native Network

New Haven Pride Center

NWPA Pride Alliance

One In Long Beach, Inc. dba The LGBTQ Center Long Beach

OutNebraska

Pacific Pride Foundation

Parents Against Vaping e-cigarettes

Paso del Norte Tobacco Control Network

Pennsylvania Equality Project

Persad Center

PFLAG National

Philanthrofund Foundation

Preventing Tobacco Addiction Foundation/Tobacco 21

Pride Center San Antonio, Inc

PROCEED INC.

Public Health Law Center

Rainbow Health Minnesota

Rainbow Rose Center

Resource Center

Sacramento LGBT Community Center

SAVE Safeguarding American Values for Everyone

Seacoast Outright

Silver State Equality

SisTers PGH

State Senator Chris Larson

Still Bisexual

Strategies for High Impact (S4HI)

The California LGBTQ Health and Human Services Network

The Center on Colfax

The Frederick Center

The LGBT Center of Greater Reading
The LGBTQ Community Center of Southern Nevada
The Pride Center at Equality Park
The Spahr Center
Transcend Charlotte
Transgender Education Network of Texas (TENT)
Transhealth Northampton
Truth Initiative
Utah Pride Center
Waves Ahead Corp Puerto Rico
Whitman-Walker Institute
William Way LGBT Community Center
Wisconsin African American Tobacco Prevention Network
Woodhull Freedom Foundation

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1. Menthol and Cigarettes. CDC. Retrieved June 9, 2022 from <https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/disparities/lgbt/index.htm>
 2. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance – United States, 2017. CDC. Retrieved June 9, 2022 from <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/67/ss/ss6708a1.htm>
 3. Ollie Ganz and Cristine Delnevo. “Cigarette Smoking and the Role of Menthol in Tobacco Use Inequalities for Sexual Minorities”, *Nicotine Tobacco Research* (October 2021): 23.

