



# ALASKA PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION

Committed To Advancing Alaska's Public Health Since 1978

## ALPHA

March 28, 2018

The Honorable Gary Stevens  
State Senate  
State Capitol, Room  
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Senator Stevens:

The Alaska Public Health Association is pleased to write this letter in support of SB 15, “an Act relating to possession of an electronic smoking product or a product containing nicotine by a minor and to selling or giving a product containing nicotine or an electronic smoking product to a minor; relating to business license endorsements to sell cigarettes, cigars, tobacco, products containing tobacco, electronic smoking products, or products containing nicotine; and relating to citations for certain offenses concerning tobacco, products containing nicotine, or electronic smoking products.”

The Alaska Public Health Association (ALPHA) is a regional affiliate of the American Public Health Association. It is a statewide membership organization of health professionals, advocates, students and community members that are dedicated to improving the health of all Alaskans.

The Alaska Public Health Association recommends that the State of Alaska raise the minimum legal sales age for tobacco products, including electronic smoking devices, to 21. Attached, for your information, is ALPHA’s Resolution **“Supporting a Minimum Legal Sales Age of 21 for Tobacco Products”**, adopted in January of 2018.

According to the 2017 Alaska Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 39.9% of high school students have ever used an electronic vapor product and 15.7% currently used an electronic vapor product (at least once in the past 30 days).

A 2015 Institute of Medicine report concludes that raising the minimum legal sales age for tobacco products to 21 nationwide would, over time, lead to a 12 percent decrease in smoking prevalence; and also predicts that raising the minimum legal sales age for tobacco products to 21 nationwide would additionally result in many fewer deaths from lung cancer, and millions fewer years of life lost for those born between 2000 and 2019.

Sincerely,

Patty Owen  
Policy Committee Co-Chair

## Supporting a Minimum Legal Sales Age of 21 for Tobacco Products<sup>1</sup>

**WHEREAS**, tobacco use is the foremost preventable cause of premature death and disease in the United States, and is responsible for approximately 480,000 deaths per year;<sup>1</sup>

**WHEREAS**, the annual economic impact of smoking in the U.S. is more than \$300 billion in health care and lost worker productivity costs;<sup>2</sup>

**WHEREAS**, national data show that 95 percent of adult smokers begin smoking before they turn 21, and that the ages of 18 to 21 are a critical period when many smokers move from experimental smoking to daily use;<sup>3</sup>

**WHEREAS**, the developing brains of young people are particularly susceptible to the addictive properties of nicotine,<sup>4</sup> and as a result, approximately three out of four teen smokers end up smoking into adulthood;<sup>5</sup>

**WHEREAS**, electronic smoking device use among minors increased dramatically between 2011 and 2015;<sup>6</sup>

**WHEREAS**, a 2015 Institute of Medicine report concludes that raising the minimum legal sales age for tobacco products to 21 nationwide would, over time, lead to a 12 percent decrease in smoking prevalence;<sup>7</sup>

**WHEREAS**, the Institute of Medicine also predicts that raising the minimum legal sales age for tobacco products to 21 nationwide would additionally result in many fewer deaths from lung cancer, and millions fewer years of life lost for those born between 2000 and 2019, and that it would result in near immediate reductions in preterm birth, low birth weight, and sudden infant death syndrome;<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> US Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2014). *The health consequences of smoking—50 years of progress: a report of the Surgeon General*, p. 659. Atlanta, GA.  
<http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/reports/50-years-of-progress/full-report.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> US Department of Health and Human Services, *supra* note 1, at 679.

<sup>3</sup> US Department of Health and Human Services. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. *National Survey on Drug Use and Health*, 2014.  
<http://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/NSDUHresultsPDFWHTML2013/Web/NSDUHresults2013.pdf>.

See also Institute of Medicine (2015). *Public Health Implications of Raising the Minimum Age of Legal Access to Tobacco Products*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.  
<http://iom.nationalacademies.org/Reports/2015/TobaccoMinimumAgeReport.aspx>.

<sup>4</sup> US Department of Health and Human Services (2014). *The Health Consequences of Smoking: 50 Years of Progress. A Report of the Surgeon General*.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2012). *Preventing Tobacco Use among Youth and Young Adults: A Report of the Surgeon General*.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health (2010). *How Tobacco Smoke Causes Disease: The Biology and Behavioral Basis for Smoking-Attributable Disease: A Report of the Surgeon General*.

<sup>5</sup> US Department of Health and Human Services (2012). *A Report of the Surgeon General: Preventing Tobacco Use among Youth and Young Adults*. <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/reports/preventing-youth-tobacco-use>.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health (2016). *E-Cigarette Use among Youth and Young Adults. A Report of the Surgeon General*. Atlanta, GA.

<sup>7</sup> Institute of Medicine (2015). *Public Health Implications of Raising the Minimum Age of Legal Access to Tobacco Products*.  
<http://iom.nationalacademies.org/Reports/2015/TobaccoMinimumAgeReport.aspx>.

**WHEREAS**, five states—Hawaii, California, Oregon, New Jersey, and Maine—and at least 280 localities, including New York City, Chicago, and Boston, have enacted laws to raise the minimum legal sales age for tobacco products to 21;<sup>8</sup>

**WHEREAS**, three-quarters of U.S. adults favor raising the minimum legal sales age for tobacco products to 21, including seven in ten smokers;<sup>9</sup>

**WHEREAS**, the retail impact of ordinances mandating a minimum legal sales age of 21 for tobacco products is minimal, with an estimated decrease of only 2%;<sup>10</sup>

**WHEREAS**, raising the legal drinking age to 21 led to reduced alcohol use and dependence among youth, and contributed to a decline in drunk driving fatalities;<sup>11</sup> and

**WHEREAS**, tobacco use kills nearly 600 Alaskans every year, and costs Alaska, in 2012 dollars, \$538 million in direct medical expenditures and additional \$231 million in lost productivity due to tobacco-related deaths;<sup>12</sup>

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that the Alaska Public Health Association recommends that the State of Alaska raise the minimum legal sales age for tobacco products, including electronic smoking devices, to 21;

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Alaska Public Health Association will inform its members of its endorsement and promote support for this initiative to the general public whenever possible.

*Adopted January 16, 2018*

---

<sup>8</sup> Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids (2017). *States and Localities that have Raised the Minimum Legal Sale Age for Tobacco Products to 21*.  
[https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/assets/content/what\\_we\\_do/state\\_local\\_issues/sales\\_21/states\\_localities\\_MLSA\\_21.pdf](https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/assets/content/what_we_do/state_local_issues/sales_21/states_localities_MLSA_21.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> King, BA et al. (2015). Attitudes Toward Raising the Minimum Age of Sale for Tobacco Among U.S. Adults, 49 (4) *Am J Prev Med.* 583.

<sup>10</sup> Winickoff, JP et al. (2014). Retail Impact of Raising Tobacco Sales Age to Twenty-One. 104 *Am J Public Health*, 18.

<sup>11</sup> DeJong, W and Blanchette, J (2014). Case Closed: Research Evidence on the Positive Public Health Impact of the Age 21 Minimum Legal Drinking Age in the United States, *J Stud Alcohol Drugs* 108 (Supp. 17 2014).

<sup>12</sup> Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Public Health, Section of Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Tobacco Prevention and Control Program (2016). *Alaska Tobacco Facts, 2016 Update*. [http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Chronic/Documents/Tobacco/PDF/2016\\_AKTobaccoFacts.pdf](http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Chronic/Documents/Tobacco/PDF/2016_AKTobaccoFacts.pdf).