

**It's cool. It's sexy.
It eases the mind.
It provides community.
And it will kill you.**

The tobacco industry has a long and lethal history of systematically targeting kids and other communities.

Like a virus, the tobacco industry is opportunistic. It preys on existing inequities in society to addict marginalized communities. Epitomized in the 1990's by Project SCUM (SubCulture Urban Marketing),¹ the industry has a documented history of targeting LGBT communities, people with mental illness, those with low-income, kids, and Black, Indigenous, People Of Color (BIPOC).

Making addiction affordable.

The tobacco industry has targeted low-income populations with myriad campaigns. The results speak for themselves: as income decreases, smoking prevalence increases.²

- Compared with higher income neighborhoods, there is a greater density of tobacco retailers in low-income neighborhoods,³ including more that are near schools.⁴
- The tobacco industry has targeted women with low-income through distribution of discount coupons, point-of-sale discounts, direct-mail coupons, and development of targeted branding.⁵
- Over the past 60 years, tobacco companies have given free cigarettes to children in housing projects, issued tobacco coupons with food stamps, and explored giving away financial products, like prepaid debit cards.⁶

“You’d be crazy to quit.”

The tobacco industry uses multiple marketing strategies to target populations with mental illnesses. Most sinister and persistent is their funding of research to foster the myth that cessation is too stressful because persons with mental illness use nicotine to alleviate negative mood.^{1, 4} The tobacco industry also:

- Makes financial contributions to organizations that work with mentally ill patients.¹
- Provide free or cheap cigarettes to psychiatric facilities.¹¹
- Support efforts to block smoke-free psychiatric hospital policies.¹¹



Our kids are Big Tobacco’s “Replacement Smokers.”⁷

The tobacco industry is laser-focused on youth and young adults, penning them their “replacement smokers.”⁷ They use celebrities and social media influencers to promote tobacco products.⁸

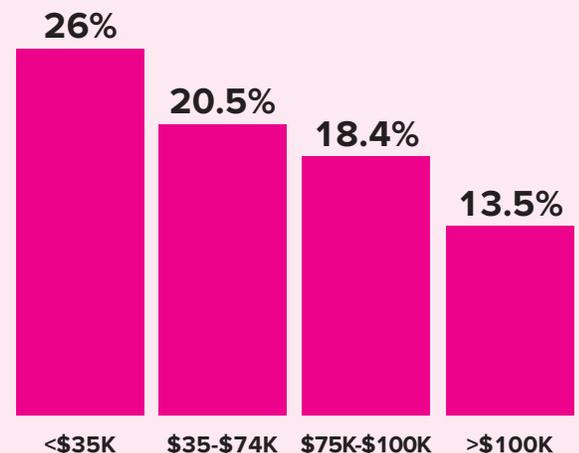
More than **90%** of youth surveyed say that marketing, advertising, and promotions make e-cigarettes appealing.⁹

Youth describe e-cigarettes as “trendy,” like “electronics” with unique packaging and dispensers.¹⁰

72% of youth surveyed think e-cigarettes are “cleaner” and “safer” than traditional cigarettes.

76% believe they are less addictive.¹⁰

As income increases, smoking prevalence decreases*:



*Percentage of U.S. adults 18 years or older reporting using a tobacco product “every day” or “some days”

Buying Acceptance.

The tobacco industry's aggressive marketing includes LGBT event sponsorships, bar promotions and giveaways, and ads.^{2, 3}

- The industry advertises at gay pride festivals and other LGBT community events, as well as contributes to local and national LGBT and HIV/AIDS organizations.³
- Tobacco ads in LGBT publications depict tobacco use as one of the cultural norms of queer life.²

Literally rooted in slavery.

The tobacco industry was built on the backs of enslaved people of color, and Big Tobacco's commitment to profiting off the lives of BIPOC workers continues. For decades, Big Tobacco has intentionally and aggressively targeted BIPOC communities, specifically with extremely addictive menthol-flavored tobacco.¹⁴ As a result, African-Americans consistently report the highest prevalence of menthol cigarette use.¹⁵

- A wealth of research indicates that African-American neighborhoods have a disproportionate number of tobacco retailers, and pervasive tobacco marketing - in particular, more marketing of menthol products.¹⁶
- A 2011 California study found that as the proportion of African-American high school students in a neighborhood rose, the proportion of menthol advertising increased, the odds of a Newport promotion were higher, and the cost of Newport cigarettes was lower.¹⁷
- Between 1998–2002, *Ebony* magazine was 9.8 times more likely than *People* magazine to contain ads for menthol cigarettes.¹⁸

We all want our children to grow up healthy and live long and productive lives. Mainers value everyone having a fair shot at success. Pairing these common values with recent events, including the e-cigarette epidemic, the COVID-19 pandemic and its tobacco-related risk factors, and the growing recognition of racial disparities as its own public health crisis, make this a critically-important moment to act.

There could not be a better time to reinforce and integrate evidence-based tobacco prevention and control policy as foundational to the health and prosperity of Maine's kids and communities.

This fact sheet was supported by the Maine Cancer Foundation.

Endnotes

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- 15 American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network. 2020. Disparities in tobacco use.
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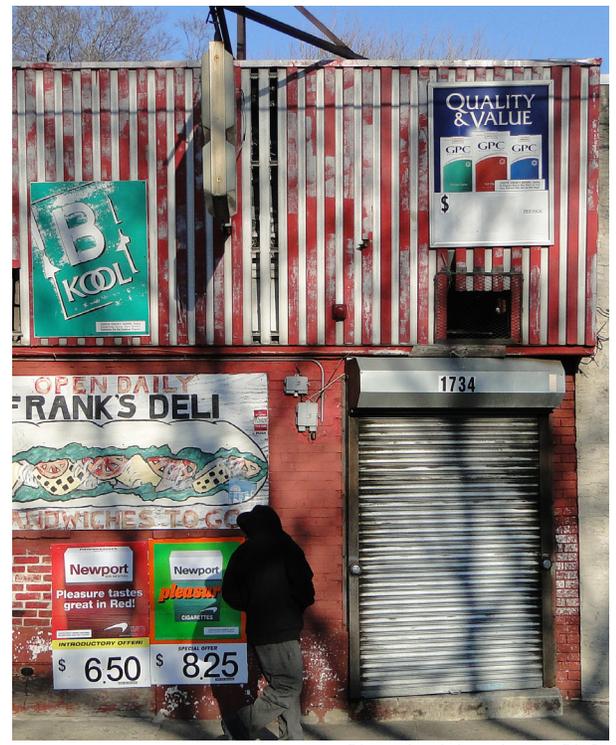


Photo by Adam Jones, Ph.D.



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