

New Surgeon General's Report Provides Strategies for Halving U.S. Smoking Rates by Year 2010

Closing the Gap, Adolescence • November/December 2000

In August 2000, Surgeon General David Satcher announced that smoking rates among teens and adults could be cut in half within the decade if the nation would fully implement anti-smoking programs using effective approaches that are already available.

Dr. Satcher released the Surgeon General's report on "Reducing Tobacco Use." It is the first-ever report to provide an in-depth analysis of the effectiveness of various methods to reduce tobacco use—educational, clinical, regulatory, economic, and social.

During the past four decades we have made unprecedented gains in preventing and controlling tobacco use," Dr. Satcher said. "However, the sobering reality is that smoking remains the leading cause of preventable death and disease in our nation, and those who suffer the most are poor Americans, minority populations, and young people. Although our knowledge remains imperfect, we know more than enough to address the tobacco control challenges of the 21st century," he said.

Health and Human Services Secretary Donna E. Shalala noted, "This report offers a science-based blueprint for achieving our Healthy People 2010 objectives to reduce tobacco use and its health impact in this country."

Key actions that Dr. Satcher outlined to reduce tobacco use, supported by evidence in the report, include:

- Implementing effective school-based programs, combined with community and media-based activities, which can prevent or postpone smoking onset in 20 to 40 percent of U.S. adolescents. Unfortunately, fewer than 5 percent of schools nationwide are implementing the major components of school guidelines recommended by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).
- Changing physician behavior, medical system procedures, and insurance coverage to encourage widespread use of state-of-the-art treatment of nicotine addiction. The report shows that brief physician ad-

Facts About Minority Teens and Smoking

- The decline of smoking among African American young people during the 1970s and 1980s was widely viewed as a great public health success. Unfortunately, recent national surveys have shown that smoking rates among African American high school students are starting to increase, although those rates are still lower than those of other students.
- Research shows an association between cigarette smoking and acculturation among Asian American and Pacific Islander adults from Southeast Asia. Those who had a higher English-language proficiency and those living in the United States longer were less likely to be smokers.
- Studies have found a higher density of tobacco billboards in racial/ethnic minority communities. For example, a 1993 study in San Diego, California found the highest proportion of tobacco billboards were posted in Asian American communities and the lowest proportion were in white communities.

Source: Tobacco Use Among U.S. Racial/Ethnic Minority Groups: A Report of the Surgeon General. (July 2000).

vice to quit smoking can double or triple normal quit rates, while a combination of behavioral counseling and pharmacological treatment can boost success up to 10 times.

- Passing and enforcing strong clean indoor air regulations, which contribute to changing social norms and may decrease tobacco consumption among smokers and increase smoking cessation. The report calls on states to pass laws that will not restrict local governments from passing even stronger measures to protect their citizens from second-hand smoke.
 - Improving tobacco warning labels in the U.S., which are weaker and less prominent than those required in other countries such as Canada and Australia. The report shows that consumers receive very little information regarding the ingredients, additives, and potential toxicity of tobacco products.
 - Increasing tobacco prices and excise taxes. Evidence presented in the report suggests that a 10 percent increase in price will reduce overall cigarette consumption by 3 to 5 percent. However, both the average price of cigarettes and the average cigarette excise tax in the United States are well below those in most other industrialized countries.
- Changing many facets of the social environment to reduce the broad cultural acceptability of tobacco use. The report concludes that comprehensive approaches combining community interventions, mass media campaigns, and program policy and regulation are most effective in changing social norms and reducing tobacco use.

"Failure to effectively use every intervention strategy at our disposal could mean turning back the clock on the efforts we've made since the 1960s to reduce cigarette smoking, one of the most notable public health accomplishments of this century," Dr. Satcher said. "We must respond aggressively to the serious challenges we still face: most importantly, the tobacco industry's continuing campaign to advertise and promote tobacco products. We need fair but aggressive measures to regulate these marketing activities, especially those that influence young people." He noted that the industry spent \$6.7 billion in 1998 or more than \$18 million a day to market cigarettes, despite the overwhelming evidence of the harm they cause.

A detailed summary of the Surgeon General's report, "Reducing Tobacco Use," is available on the CDC's web site: http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/gr_tobacco_use.htm.

