

Institute of Medicine (IOM) ⁱ Report Calls for Smoking Cessation Coverage
“Ending the Tobacco Problem: A Blueprint for the Nation,” May 2007

KEY FINDINGS

Tobacco is a unique product because it kills more Americans than AIDS, alcohol, cocaine, heroin, homicides, suicides, car accidents and fires combined.

Almost half of the USA's 44.5 million adult smokers will die prematurely of a tobacco-related illness if they don't stop. About 21% of American adults smoke.

SMOKING DECLINE IS LEVELING OFF

Since 1964 the prevalence of smoking among U.S. adults has dropped by 58 percent, saving hundreds of thousands from lung cancer, heart disease, and other smoking-related maladies. But the news is not all good: There are signs that the decline in the rate of smoking is leveling off.

“Ending the Tobacco Problem: A Blueprint for the Nation,” states that the difficulty that some individuals continue to face in quitting and the way that members of certain groups are still starting to smoke in large numbers, implies that the traditional approaches are insufficient.

BOLD ACTION

The report calls for bold action including:

- Requiring all insurers — including the Medicare and Medicaid programs — to cover smoking-cessation programs.
- Licensing retailers that sell cigarettes, just as states issue licenses to sell alcohol.
- Raising cigarette taxes as much as \$2 a pack.
- Banning smoking in all non-residential indoor areas.

COMPREHENSIVE SMOKING CESSATION POLICY FOR ALL SMOKERS

According to the Report, effective smoking cessation interventions exist, including behavioral and pharmacological programs able to reach smokers through many delivery channels.

Using evidence-based programs significantly increases success, from almost double to as much as fourfold the cessation rate of quitting on one's own.

Policies that achieve the following three goals will save millions of smokers from premature death and disease and will also save billions of dollars in excess cost to our nation.

1. Reach and motivate more current smokers to make more frequent quit attempts, especially reaching the underserved;
2. Ensure quitters know about and use appropriate evidence based programs, and

3. Enact policy that guarantees continuity of delivery of effective services via a comprehensive system of care management for all smokers.

STRENGTHENING TRADITIONAL MEASURES

The report calls for upping the ante on existing policies that discourage smoking.

Research shows that increasing taxes on cigarettes is one of the most effective ways to decrease smoking, particularly among adolescents.

The committee also recommends a new provision that precludes state regulation only of the characteristics of tobacco products and their packaging, while allowing the states to regulate tobacco in all other domains, including its marketing and distribution. The goal is to have federal regulations act as a floor upon which the states could build by adding restrictions if they choose.

A LARGER FEDERAL ROLE

The Report calls upon Congress to give the FDA broad regulatory authority over the manufacture, distribution, marketing, and use of tobacco products, particularly in the labeling of cigarettes.

Current labels are insufficient for two reasons: the labels do not provide enough information to enable consumers to make a true “informed choice” whether to smoke. And second, even if the labels did provide sufficient information for informed choice, the real purpose of the labels should be something other than promoting informed choice—it should be to discourage cigarette smoking outright, particularly among children and youth.

The committee suggests having rotating series of graphic, fullcolor warnings that cover 50 percent of the package, equivalent to what is already required in Canada.

Finally, the committee calls for banning the use of such terms as “mild” or “light” to describe cigarettes, as they can give consumers the mistaken impression that such cigarettes are relatively safe.

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