



Statement for the Record
Hearing before the Energy and Commerce Health Subcommittee
on
Legislation to Reverse the Youth Tobacco Epidemic
October 16, 2019

On behalf of the more than 145,000 osteopathic physicians and medical students our organizations represent, we applaud the committee's leadership on the *Reversing the Youth Tobacco Epidemic Act of 2019*. This legislation is critical in addressing the smoking epidemic among youth and young adults, a population that is particularly susceptible to addiction, whose brains are still developing, and among whom nicotine use can have long-term developmental harms.

In light of the long-term health problems that nicotine and tobacco use can have on teenagers, tobacco use trends among the younger generation are especially troubling. From 2017 to 2018, e-cigarette use by high school students increased by 78%, accounting for 3.05 million students. This trend is correlated with an overall increase in tobacco product use by high school students of 38%.¹ Increasing the age of sale for all tobacco products to 21, prohibiting the marketing of tobacco products by means that appeal to youth, prohibiting the flavoring of e-cigarette products, and requiring face-to-face transactions are essential to a comprehensive approach to curbing the epidemic of youth tobacco and e-cigarette usage. We also greatly appreciate the legislation's language that extends tobacco user fees to e-cigarette products, an important step to ensure that federal agencies have the resources necessary to respond to the health consequences of these products' use.

The emphasis this legislation places on discouraging e-cigarette usage among youth is especially crucial at this moment, as health care providers across the country are working to understand and treat an increasing number of e-cigarette related illnesses. To date, the epidemic of vaping related illnesses has reached 1,080 cases and 18 deaths across 48 states and one territory. Among the victims, 37% are aged 20 or younger, with 16% being under the age of 18.² The disproportionate impact of this crisis among youth is likely an indication of the impact of marketing e-cigarette products to this population and of the online sale of e-cigarette products.

As osteopathic physicians, we are on the front lines, treating not only victims of the current cigarette crisis, but also victims of the greater youth tobacco epidemic. Caring for tobacco users each day, we witness the toll these products take on their health, and we welcome the policy changes outlined in this legislation. In our efforts to partner with our patients to support their well-being, we frequently advise patients on the harms of tobacco use and support smokers in their cessation efforts. The AOA has partnered with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Office of Smoking and Health to promote resources from the Tips From Former Smokers (Tips) campaign. Osteopathic physicians have been leveraging the Tips resources for health professionals in conversations with their patients about quitting smoking.

However, the strongest public health approach to decrease tobacco use nationwide is effectively preventing people from ever starting to use tobacco products. The *Reversing the Youth Tobacco Epidemic Act of 2019* is crucial to this effort.

The AOA appreciates the subcommittee's leadership on this issue and for convening this hearing. We welcome the opportunity to work with the committee to enact this legislation. Please contact John-Michael Villarama at jvillarama@osteopathic.org with any questions or additional information.

¹ <https://www.fda.gov/TobaccoProducts/PublicHealthEducation/ProtectingKidsfromTobacco/ucm625887.htm>

² https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/basic_information/e-cigarettes/severe-lung-disease.html