

New Surgeon General Report on Smoking and Health Released: Progress Made; Battle Not Won

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In 1962, my dad, newspaper reporter L. Edgar Prina (who passed away in 2013), asked President John F. Kennedy an important question: What was the president going to do about smoking in the United States? Some people now view this question as among the catalysts of the antismoking movement in this country.

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) released its most recent report on smoking on January 17: [*The Health Consequences of Smoking—50 Years of Progress: A Report of the Surgeon General*](#).

Key points in the report include the following:

- * Adult smoking prevalence is now less than half of what it was in 1964, reports HHS, and the prevalence among youth is less than half of what it was then.
- * If smoking continues at the current rate among U.S. young adults, “5.6 million of today’s Americans” under age 18 “are projected to die prematurely from a smoking-related illness.”
- * The report also mentions diseases such as colorectal cancer, liver cancer, and diabetes mellitus as being caused by smoking. And exposure to second-hand smoke is a cause of stroke, the report states.
- * From 2005 to 2009, smoking caused more than 480,000 premature deaths.
- * How much does “direct medical care” for adults that is attributable to smoking cost? Costs are now estimated to be more than \$130 billion a year!

* The report calls out industry: "The tobacco epidemic was initiated and has been sustained by the aggressive strategies of the tobacco industry, which has deliberately misled the public on the risks of smoking cigarettes."

The report mentions some "effective programs and policies: raising the retail price of cigarettes and other tobacco products, smokefree indoor air policies, high-impact media campaigns, full access to cessation treatments, and funding of comprehensive statewide tobacco control programs" at levels recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The HHS press release accompanying the report mentions the Obama administration's efforts to end the tobacco epidemic. These include the law giving the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulatory authority over tobacco products and "significant expansion of tobacco cessation coverage through the Affordable Care Act."

Seven Groups Have Called for Continued Action on Reducing Smoking

Earlier this month, seven health groups (American Academy of Pediatrics, American Cancer Society's Cancer Action Network, American Heart Association, American Lung Association, Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights, Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, and Legacy [**formerly called the American Legacy Foundation**]) held an event commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the first *Surgeon General's Report on Smoking and Health* (released January 11, 1964).

Michael D. Terry, the son of Surgeon General Luther Terry, who wrote that first report on smoking, represented his dad at the January event held by the seven organizations at the National Press Club, in Washington. [Listen to Legacy's interview with him.](#)

While celebrating the progress in the fight against tobacco use that has been made in the past fifty years, the groups stated three goals for all levels of government:

- * Reduce smoking rates, now about 18 percent, to less than 10 percent within ten years.
- * Protect all Americans from second-hand smoke within five years.
- * Ultimately eliminate the death and disease caused by using tobacco.

"Tobacco use is still the number-one cause of preventable death in the United States," they noted in a press release.

Here are just a few tidbits that I found interesting at the briefing:

The main reason we have not accomplished more in the war against smoking is because of the behavior of the tobacco industry—they have huge marketing budgets, said Matthew Myers of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids.

Both Mariell Jessup of the American Heart Association and Dick Woodruff of the American Cancer Society noted that their groups and others wrote to President John F. Kennedy in 1961 to ask that a national commission on smoking be appointed.

[Kenneth Warner](#) of the University of Michigan also spoke at the event. He coauthored a recent article in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* on [“Tobacco Control and the Reduction in Smoking-Related Premature Deaths in the United States, 1964–2012.”](#)

Robin Koval, Legacy’s new president (read more about her in my GrantWatch column in the March issue of *Health Affairs*) mentioned that movies are very influential in getting youth to smoke. She noted later in the briefing that Legacy is focusing on “priority populations” who are most at risk for smoking. (This aligns with what Tom Frieden, director of the CDC, said in the Foreword to the new surgeon general’s report: “Tobacco control efforts need to not only address the general population, but also to focus on populations with a higher prevalence of tobacco use and lower rates of quitting.”)

Paul Billings of the American Lung Association said that the FDA must have the power to regulate all products, including electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) and cigars, he commented.

Smoking and nicotine addiction are a “pediatric disease,” said James Perrin of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

In the question and answer session that followed, Myers stated that “we need the political will” to carry out policies that we know are effective.

Maggie Fox of NBC News asked whether all organizations sponsoring the briefing have come out against e-cigarettes. Myers said whatever *potential* e-cigarettes may have in getting people to stop smoking, they need to be carefully monitored and regulated by the FDA. Cynthia Hallett of Americans for Nonsmokers’ Rights commented that their vapor is a concern, so they should not be used in smoke-free environments. Billings stated that “no federal agency knows what’s in e-cigarettes.” Preliminary FDA research has

shown that they contain carcinogens, and no e-cigarette has been approved as a smoking cessation product. He mentioned the association's concern about e-cigarettes being marketed to kids.

Another questioner (from Voice of America) asked whether there were any studies on why people with low-incomes are more likely to smoke cigarettes than others are. Warner said that in the United States, people with low incomes and low levels of education are more likely to smoke, and in developing countries, persuasive cigarette advertising tactics are used, and those who are not well educated are susceptible to the ads. Warner added that in the United States, 40 to 50 percent of all smokers "have a concurrent mental illness" or another substance abuse issue. Many people are addressing the mental health link, including [Steve Schroeder](#) of the University of California, San Francisco; he is a former president of the [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](#).

A CBS News reporter inquired about [New York City's raising the age](#) at which one is allowed to buy cigarettes to twenty-one—is this a trend? Myers said that the city will get data to see if the law is effective. Koval commented that raising the age helps, but the "industry is quite clever." The age of starting to smoke is increasing, and so tobacco companies will target college students and young adults.

Kentucky Health Issues Poll: State Opinion on Smoke-Free Law

The Kentucky Health Issues Poll found that in that tobacco state, "support for a statewide smoke-free law is at its highest point ever," according to a January 2 press release. The [Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky](#) and [Interact for Health](#) (formerly called the Health Foundation of Greater Cincinnati) funded the poll.

Sixty-five percent of adults in the Bluegrass State now are in favor of such a law. Thirty-eight percent of respondents who are current smokers support a smoke-free law. A third of respondents to the poll said that they currently smoke. The Institute for Policy Research at the University of Cincinnati conducted the poll October 25–November 26, 2013.

[Listen to an interview](#) with Susan Zepeda, president and CEO of the Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky. It aired on Time Warner Cable's Channel 2 that serves the Louisville, Northern Kentucky, Lexington, Evansville, and Bowling Green markets.

Related resources from Health Affairs issues:

["Banning Smoking in Parks and on Beaches: Science, Policy, and the Politics of Denormalization,"](#) by Ronald Bayer and Kathleen E. Bachynski of Columbia University, July 2013. (Free access to full text of this article through February 4) The authors received funding from the **American Legacy Foundation** for part of their research.

["Smoking Bans Linked to Lower Hospitalizations for Heart Attacks and Lung Disease among Medicare Beneficiaries,"](#) by Mark W. Vander Weg of the University of Iowa Carver School of Medicine, Gary E. Rosenthal, and Mary Vaughan Sarrazin, December 2012.

["Analysis of Media Campaign Promoting Smoking Cessation Suggests It Was Cost-Effective in Prompting Quit Attempts,"](#) by Andrea C. Villanti of the Schroeder Institute for Tobacco Research and Policy Studies at the American Legacy Foundation, Laurel E. Curry, Amanda Richardson, Donna M. Vallone, and David R. Holtgrave, December 2012. This study was funded by the **American Legacy Foundation**.

["Simulation of Quitting Smoking in the Military Shows Higher Lifetime Medical Spending More than Offset by Productivity Gains,"](#) by Wenya Yang of the Lewin Group, Timothy M. Dall, Yiduo Zhang, Shiping Zhang, David R. Arday, Patricia W. Dorn, and Anjali Jain, December 2012.

Related resources from Health Affairs GrantWatch Blog:

["Women and Smoking: New Funding for Tobacco Control in the Developing World,"](#) by Caroline T. Roan of the **Pfizer Foundation**, September 22, 2011. This foundation has concluded its funding of antismoking efforts for now, but it continues to share the results of its work in this field, Roan told me recently.

["A Foundation's Win at Public Health Policy on Smoking,"](#) by Billie Hall of the **Sunflower Foundation** (Topeka, Kansas), June 15, 2010.

Additional resources:

["The Surgeon General's Report at 50: Not a Golden Anniversary,"](#) January 10 PR Newswire press release about a new film, [*Blowing Smoke: The Lost Legacy of the Surgeon General's Report*](#). The short film is by Alan Blum, who directs the University of Alabama Center for the Study of Tobacco and Society and is a veteran antismoking activist. He founded the international physicians'

antismoking organization Doctors Ought to Care (1977-2002), and as editor of the *Medical Journal of Australia* and the *New York State Journal of Medicine*, he published the first-ever medical-journal thematic issues on tobacco, the release pointed out.

"Antismoking Policies Have Saved More than 8 Million Lives," by Clara Ritger, January 9 *National Journal Daily*. This article is also about the January 8 briefing at the National Press Club, which I described earlier.