



RAISING THE TOBACCO SALE AGE TO 21: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE MILITARY

Military leaders recognize the toll tobacco takes on troop readiness and on the military health care system and are actively taking steps to reduce tobacco use in the military. Tobacco use remains this nation's number one preventable cause of premature death and disease, killing more than 480,000 Americans annually.¹ The Department of Defense (DoD) estimates that 175,000 current Active Duty Service members will die from smoking unless they are able to quit.² Almost all smokers start smoking before the age of 21,³ and the ages of 18 to 21 are a critical period when many smokers move from experimental smoking to regular, daily use.

Tobacco use is not a rite of passage or an expression of freedom. It is an addiction. Tobacco companies target young people before they can fully appreciate the consequences of becoming addicted to the nicotine in tobacco. Nearly 70% of adult smokers want to quit⁴, but once a person is addicted to nicotine, it is difficult to stop, and the health consequences begin immediately and accumulate over a lifetime.

Tobacco companies have a long history of promoting tobacco to members of the military and have a vested interest in tobacco use by the military, an important market for recruitment of the next generation of smokers.⁵ Raising the tobacco sale age to 21 will help prevent our service members from starting to use this deadly and addictive product and support DoD efforts to reduce tobacco use among service members.

Military Leaders Support Tobacco Prevention and Cessation

Tobacco use is bad for military preparedness. The military recognizes the negative impact of tobacco on troop readiness and soldiers' health and has initiated a series of actions to curb tobacco use in the military.⁶ The Department of Defense and the Army, Navy, Marines, and Air Force have each set goals to become tobacco-free.⁷ In April 2016, the Department of Defense approved actions "to ensure a comprehensive tobacco policy that assists with preventing initiation of tobacco use, helping those who want to quit using tobacco succeed, and decreasing exposure to secondhand smoke for all our people."⁸

Our military leaders understand the toll tobacco takes on our troops. DoD's *Quit Tobacco—Make Everyone Proud* cessation campaign advertised quotes and videos from high-ranking military officials about the toll tobacco has on health and military readiness:

- General Robert Magnus, now retired Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps, stated, "*Tobacco impairs reaction time and judgment. It stands in the way of a Marine's number one priority: to be in top physical and mental shape - combat ready.*"⁹
- Rodney J. McKinley, now retired Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force has stated, "*Tobacco use impacts physical fitness, night vision and healing – it impairs mission readiness.*"¹⁰

Military officers and veterans have also spoken out in favor of tobacco 21 policies:

- After Hawaii raised its tobacco sale age to 21, effective January 1, 2016, Hawaii's military bases opted to comply with the higher age in recognition of its benefits to readiness, health and finances:¹¹

- Bill Doughty, spokesman for the Navy Region Hawaii, stated, *"We see it as a fitness and readiness issue. When we can prevent sailors from smoking or using tobacco, if we can get them to quit, then that improves their fitness and readiness, and it saves them a ton of money too."*¹²
- Rear Admiral John Fuller, Navy Region Hawaii and Naval Surface Group Middle Pacific stated, *"I've heard this argument by some shipmates against cracking down on tobacco: 'If someone is young enough to die for their country, they should be free to be allowed to smoke.' But, turning that argument on its head: 'If someone is young enough to fight for their country, they should be free from addiction to a deadly drug.' Tobacco harms people's physical wellbeing, leads to illness and costs them money."*¹³
- In testimony submitted on behalf of the Oregon Military Department and the Oregon National Guard, Major General Michael Stencel, the Adjutant General for the state of Oregon, stated that they would not seek a military waiver. He stated that, *"Reducing tobacco use within the Oregon National Guard will have an immediate, positive impact on the resiliency and readiness of our Soldiers and Airmen."*¹⁴
- 27-year senior officer of the Air Force and Chautauqua, New York, County Executive Vince Horrigan, stated, on signing a bill to raise the tobacco sale age to 21: *"As a retired 27-year senior officer of the Air Force, I join with many other military leaders in the perspective that tobacco products are a threat to our military readiness and too often compromise the health of our professional military who put their lives on the line to defend our freedoms."*¹⁵
- Major General Bret Daugherty, the Adjutant General for the state of Washington and Commander of the Washington National Guard stated in testimony supporting raising the tobacco sale age: *"...I want to address the age-old argument that if someone is old enough to serve their country in the military, then they are old enough to use tobacco products. This is clearly an outdated argument. There is a laundry list of things that we as a country have decided are contrary to the interest of young people and public health, whether they are in the military or not. Decades ago, this very body saw the wisdom in raising the drinking age to 21. That policy change significantly reduced drunk driving deaths and contributed to the overall health of our public here in the state."*¹⁶
- Retired military leaders supported an Illinois bill to raise the tobacco sale age to 21. Major General (Ret) William Enyart, U.S. Army, Former Adjutant General of Illinois, 2007-2013; Major General (Ret) Randal Thomas, U.S. Army Former Adjutant General of Illinois, 2003-2007; Brigadier General (Ret) John "Jay" Sheedy, U.S. Air Force, Brigadier General (Ret) Avrum Mark Rabin, Illinois Air National Guard stated: *"Americans owe much to the young people who choose to serve in our military. But early addiction to a deadly drug is no reward. Their physical fitness and health should be paramount in policymaking decisions."*¹⁷

Tobacco Use Hurts Military Readiness and Is Costly

While tobacco use takes an enormous toll on all users, it has particularly detrimental consequences for active duty military personnel. Tobacco use reduces soldiers' physical fitness and endurance and is linked to higher rates of absenteeism and lost productivity. In addition, service members who use tobacco are more likely to drop out of basic training, sustain injuries and have poor vision, all of which compromise troop readiness.¹⁸ Tobacco use places a

significant burden on the Department of Defense (DoD). The DoD spends more than \$1.6 billion each year on tobacco-related medical care, increased hospitalizations, and lost days of work.¹⁹

Tobacco Use Among Active Duty U.S. Military

Smoking rates are higher among active duty military than among civilians. Nearly one-quarter (24.0%) of active duty military personnel in 2011 reported currently smoking, compared to 19 percent of civilians at that time.²⁰ Smoking rates vary significantly by service, ranging from 16.7 percent in the U.S. Air Force to 30.8 percent in the U.S. Marine Corps. Many of the military's current cigarette smokers are dual users of smokeless tobacco.²¹ In addition, close to half of all military service members (49.2%) used a nicotine product* in the past twelve months.²²

Alarming, many current military smokers - 36 to 40 percent - report initiating tobacco use *after* joining the military.²³ Given everything we know about what smoking does to the body and how it weakens our combat preparedness, it is unacceptable that soldiers smoke at higher rates than the general population and that more than 1 in 3 soldiers who are current smokers started smoking *after* joining the military.

Raising the Minimum Legal Sale Age Will Help Save Lives

Raising the tobacco sale age is an evidence-based policy that is an important part of a comprehensive approach to tobacco prevention. A 2015 report by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) concluded that raising the tobacco age to 21 will have a positive impact on public health and save lives.²⁴ Specifically, raising the age to 21 is predicted to reduce the smoking rate by about 12 percent and smoking-related deaths by 10 percent over time, which translates into 223,000 fewer premature deaths, 50,000 fewer deaths from lung cancer, and 4.2 million fewer years of life lost.²⁵

Tobacco use is a deadly and addictive behavior that compromises the readiness and health of our military and prematurely kills half its adult users.²⁶ Raising the tobacco sale age to 21 is an important step that will protect young people and service members from a deadly addiction and will complement other tobacco prevention and cessation efforts being undertaken by the military.

Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, April 25, 2019 / Laura Bach

¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *The Health Consequences of Smoking: 50 Years of Progress. A Report of the Surgeon General*. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2014.

² Department of Defense, Memorandum re: Reducing Tobacco Use in the Armed Forces and Department of Defense, March 14, 2014.

³ United States Department of Health and Human Services. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2014. ICPSR36361-v1. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2016-03-22. <http://doi.org/10.3886/ICPSR36361.v1>

⁴ Babb, Stephen. "Quitting Smoking Among Adults—United States, 2000–2015." *MMWR. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 65 (2017)

⁵ Smith, Elizabeth A., and Ruth E. Malone. "'Everywhere the soldier will be': wartime tobacco promotion in the US military." *American Journal of Public Health* 99.9 (2009): 1595-1602 and Smith, Elizabeth A., and Ruth E. Malone. "Tobacco promotion to military personnel: 'the plums are here to be plucked'." *Military Medicine* 174.8 (2009): 797

⁶ Partnership for Prevention and Action to Quit, *Help Your Patients Quit Tobacco: An Implementation Guide for the Armed Forces*, July 2014, <http://actiontoquit.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/armedforcetobaccocessationguide.pdf> and Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter, "Policy Memorandum 16-001, Department of Defense Tobacco Policy," April 8, 2016, <http://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcphc/Documents/health-promotion-wellness/tobacco-free-living/INCOMING-CARTER-Tobacco-Policy-Memo.pdf>

* Nicotine product includes cigarettes, chewing tobacco, snuff, other smokeless tobacco including new forms of smokeless (e. g. dissolvables), cigars, pipes, and electronic nicotine delivery products.

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- ⁷ Institute of Medicine, *Combating Tobacco in Military and Veteran Populations*, 2009.
<http://nationalacademies.org/hmd/Reports/2009/MilitarySmokingCessation.aspx>; see also, <https://www.ucanquit2.org/AboutUs/Policy>
- ⁸ Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter, "Policy Memorandum 16-001, Department of Defense Tobacco Policy," April 8, 2016,
<http://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcphc/Documents/health-promotion-wellness/tobacco-free-living/INCOMING-CARTER-Tobacco-Policy-Memo.pdf>
- ⁹ U.S. Department of Defense, *UCanQuit2.org*, <https://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcphc/Documents/health-promotion-wellness/tobacco-free-living/gen-magnus.pdf>.
- ¹⁰ U.S. Department of Defense, *UCanQuit2.org*, <https://www.mildenhall.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/273201/new-smoking-cessation-site-helps-airmen-kick-butts/>.
- ¹¹ Seck, Hope Hodge, "Marines Will Comply With Hawaii Law Raising Smoking Age to 21," December 29, 2015, <http://www.military.com/daily-news/2015/12/29/marines-will-comply-with-hawaii-law-raising-smoking-age-to-21.html>; Uyeno, Kristine, "Tobacco, eCig laws take effect on New Year's Day; Hawaii first state to raise legal age to 21," December 28, 2015, <http://khon2.com/2015/12/28/new-years-day-tobacco-ecig-laws-hawaii-first-state-to-raise-legal-age-to-21-3/>
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<https://olis.leg.state.or.us/liz/2017R1/Downloads/CommitteeMeetingDocument/122339>.
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- ¹⁶ Major General Bret Daugherty, *Testimony in Support of SB 5025 to the Washington State Senate Commerce, Labor, and Sports Committee*, February 9, 2017
- ¹⁷ Mission: Readiness, Military Leaders for Kids, *Letter in support of IL SB3011 to raise the tobacco sale age to 21*, April 19, 2016
- ¹⁸ Institute of Medicine, *Combating Tobacco in Military and Veteran Populations*, 2009.
<http://nationalacademies.org/hmd/Reports/2009/MilitarySmokingCessation.aspx>
- ¹⁹ Institute of Medicine, *Combating Tobacco in Military and Veteran Populations*, 2009.
<http://nationalacademies.org/hmd/Reports/2009/MilitarySmokingCessation.aspx>
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- ²¹ Department of Defense, *2011 Health Related Behaviors Survey of Active Duty Military Personnel*,
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