

LGBT People & Smoking

LGBT communities are among the populations most severely impacted by tobacco use.

- LGBT are 40-70% more likely to smoke than non-LGBT.^{1, 2}
- This is one of the highest smoking rates even of all the disproportionately affected sub-populations.³
- LGBT adolescents are taking up smoking at an alarming rate, in a recent national study 45% of females and 35% of males reporting same-sex attraction or behavior smoked. In comparison, only 29% of the rest of the youth smoked.⁴
- American Cancer Society estimates that over 30,000 LGBT people die each year of tobacco-related diseases.⁵ This is a very conservative estimate, because it presumes we smoke at the same rate as the general population.

Do we know why?

- Several factors such as higher levels of social stress, frequent patronage of bars and clubs, higher rates of alcohol and drug use, and direct targeting of LGBT consumers by the tobacco industry may be related to higher prevalence rates of tobacco use among some LGBT people.¹

Tobacco companies have targeted LGBT populations, compromising our communities' work against this major health threat.

- Tobacco companies offer an unknown amount of financial support to LGBT festivals, bars, media, and local organizations.¹ Sometimes this money comes with conditions, for example, some gay bars are prohibited from allowing any anti-tobacco promotion onsite.
- As early supporters of LGBT causes, the Tobacco companies garnered appreciative community response, since many other funders avoided LGBT issues.^{6, 7}
- An early Tobacco industry document described the plan for increasing sales among San Francisco's gay and homeless populations, it was labeled "Project SCUM".⁸
- Tobacco industry funding can compromise anti-tobacco activities by LGBT community organizations (for example, while major TV networks refused to air an ad exposing "Project SCUM", GLAAD was taking tobacco industry money in support of their annual gala).⁹

Negative health impacts of tobacco continue to be under-estimated.

- Up to ½ of people who smoke will die early as a result, losing an average of 10-20 years of life.¹⁰
- Tobacco is the number one cause of mortality in this country.¹¹
- In the United States, tobacco kills more people each day than AIDS, alcohol, car accidents, firearms, and illegal drugs – combined.¹²

- The tobacco industry spends almost \$14 billion each year on promotion and marketing.¹³ This dollar amount is bigger than the budget for CDC or HRSA. The money is spread liberally to groups that assist tobacco industry objectives, such as fighting clean indoor air laws, or helping defuse public outcry over the health impacts and costs of smoking.¹⁴

LGBT People and cessation

- Although more lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender smokers believe smoking increases their risk of diseases such as lung cancer and heart disease, fewer have made quit attempts (75% compared with 80% of all adults).¹⁵
- Of LGBT respondents who reported making a quit attempt, on average, they had tried and failed to quit smoking eight times, the same as all adults.¹⁵
- An increasing number of LGBT-tailored cessation programs are available, but most of the LGBT population still does not have access to them.

LGBT people want clean indoor air

- A recent national survey by Harris Interactive found that exactly one set of respondents were more likely to pay extra to go to a bar that was smokefree, LGBT people.¹⁶

For more information on any of the facts quoted in this factsheet, please contact Donald Hitchcock at the National Coalition for LGBT Health at coalition@lgbthealth.net. This factsheet was prepared by Scout and Donald Hitchcock on 5/23/05, with assistance from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, www.smokefree.net, the American Cancer Society, and the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids.

Citations

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