

# NCI TOBACCO CONTROL MONOGRAPH SERIES

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## THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN PROMOTING AND REDUCING TOBACCO USE

### MONOGRAPH NINETEEN

# 19

#### Information for Policymakers

In the twentieth century, mass media helped create new generations of tobacco users, even as evidence mounted about tobacco's terrible toll on health. Today, as the scope of media influence has expanded and evolved in the new age of the Internet, harnessing the media's power to discourage tobacco use is one of the major public health challenges of the new century. This monograph, *The Role of the Media in Promoting and Reducing Tobacco Use*, presented by the National Cancer Institute, comes at a critical time as both the tobacco industry and public health advocates seek to use new and more diverse forms of media. Despite a roughly 50% decline in adult smoking prevalence over the past 40 years, about one in five Americans continues to smoke, and more than 4,000 young people smoke their first cigarette each day.

This monograph provides a comprehensive review of the scientific literature from several disciplines to analyze media strategies that promote or reduce tobacco use. In addition, the monograph explores and identifies strategies to leverage the media to best serve the public health in this high-stakes arena.

A fundamental theme in this monograph is the dynamic interplay between the forces that work to promote tobacco use and those that work to control or prevent it. For example, while media campaigns have warned about the dangers of smoking, smoking proponents have sent out the message that smoking cigarettes confers social status, athleticism, and glamour.

Key findings that may serve to inform tobacco control efforts include:

- Tobacco advertising and promotion increase smoking initiation among youth, and even brief exposure to tobacco advertising can influence adolescents.
- Only comprehensive bans on tobacco advertising and promotion reduce tobacco use. Partial bans enable the industry to use alternative forms of media to promote its products.
- Exposure to tobacco use in the movies is causally related to youth smoking initiation. Depictions of smoking are pervasive in movies and occur in three-quarters or more of new box-office hits.

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- Mass media campaigns can reduce youth and adult smoking.
- Youth antitobacco campaigns run by the tobacco industry have not worked and may even increase youth smoking.

A final section of the monograph reviews future directions in research and policy that might enhance the effectiveness of media strategies for tobacco control. Systematic monitoring of tobacco companies' activities and expenditures, including those for corporate sponsorship and corporate advertising, is also a key research task.

When making policy decisions, it is important to recognize that the tobacco industry spends billions of dollars annually (more than \$13 billion in 2005) on tobacco advertising and promotion and uses an integrated, multifaceted marketing strategy. Public health officials and policymakers need to devote considerable resources to tobacco control measures and to media campaigns, using the latest audience research, to overcome the effects of tobacco marketing.

Success is possible. Smoking by adults in the United States has decreased approximately 50% since the 1960s—a process that started with the media publicity concerning the 1964 Surgeon General's first report on smoking and health and continues through today's media advocacy efforts on behalf of tobacco control. However, tobacco use still accounts for nearly one-third of cancer deaths worldwide, and the World Health Organization predicts that tobacco-attributable mortality will increase in the coming decades if current smoking patterns continue. If this trend is to be stopped, an understanding of the media's power to affect tobacco use must guide the way.

### **About the NCI Tobacco Control Monograph Series**

The National Cancer Institute established the Tobacco Control Monograph series in 1991 to provide ongoing and timely information about emerging issues in smoking and tobacco prevention and control. Monographs are available at no cost in print and online.

### **For More Information**

For more information or to order this monograph, go to <http://www.cancercontrol.cancer.gov/tcrb/monographs/19/index.html>. To order a free copy, call the NCI Cancer Information Service at 1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237) and ask for NIH Publication No. 07-6242.