



APPEAL

Tobacco use in Asian American and Pacific Islander communities

Impact

Tobacco use is the single most preventable cause of death for all groups, including Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs). An estimated 15,000 to 20,000 AAPIs will die each year from tobacco-related illnesses.* Smoking and use of smokeless tobacco kills more people each year than AIDS, alcohol and drug abuse, car crashes, injuries, murders, and suicides combined.

Prevalance

Local studies have shown that smoking rates are highest among males in certain AAPI ethnic groups (i.e., Cambodian, Laotian, Samoan, Native Hawaiian). In addition, betel nut mixed with tobacco is used by more than 2/3 of all males and females in some Pacific Island jurisdictions.

Youth

According to the 2000 National Youth Tobacco Survey, Asian American youth had a seven-fold increase in smoking from 7th to 12th grades, the highest increase of any ethnic group. While Asian American teens had the lowest smoking rates in middle school, their smoking rates were second only to Whites by senior year. AAPI high school students also had the second highest use of menthol cigarettes among ethnic groups.

Targeting

Tobacco companies are aggressively marketing their products to AAPI communities both in the U.S. and overseas. As early as the 1980s, the tobacco industry recognized the importance of AAPIs as a potential consumer market. Although tobacco use among Asian American women has traditionally been low, increased targeting of AAPI women and girls has resulted in increased prevalence. Tobacco companies also sponsor AAPI organizations

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and cultural events as a way of buying legitimacy in the AAPI community. As a result, AAPI organizations may find it difficult to speak out against the tobacco industry targeting of the AAPI community.

Community Involvement

We must recognize that tobacco use has a negative impact on our communities. It is time for AAPI communities to respond to increased tobacco use and tobacco industry targeting. AAPI communities need to advocate that tobacco prevention and control become high priorities, and that AAPI tobacco issues be integrated into all aspects of mainstream tobacco control activities.

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*This figure is roughly calculated based on AAPIs at 4% of the U.S. population in 2000.

For more information, please see the APPEAL educational kit, *Making Tobacco Relevant for Asian American and Pacific Islander Communities*.