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**Tobacco Free NYS calls Big Tobacco’s tactics unjust; spotlights the industry’s practice of target marketing menthol-flavored tobacco products to the LGBTQIA+ community**

LGBT adults smoke 2.5 times the rate of their non-LGBT peers

**ALBANY, N.Y.** – Each year, tens of thousands of LGBTQIA+ lives are cut short from smoking-related illnesses. LGBT-identified individuals are twice as likely to use tobacco products compared to their non-LGBT counterparts.1,2 The LGBTQIA+ community is among the hardest hit by tobacco, and the higher smoking rates can be attributed to the industry’s aggressive marketing of menthol-flavored tobacco products to this community.1,2,3 Menthol is not just a flavor. It makes smoking easier to start and harder to quit, and it’s used as a manipulative way for tobacco companies to target, attract and addict LGBTQIA+ individuals. To fight this injustice, Tobacco Free NYS introduces the third phase of its statewide “[It’s Not Just](https://notjustmenthol.org)” campaign intended to educate people about these deceptive tactics, end the misconception that menthol is just a flavor and urge the public to act.

"The LGBTQIA+ community has a long history fighting for justice and equality, and unfortunately the tobacco industry recognized how the fierceness of our community could make a profit," said Gabe Glissmeyer, project specialist with the National LGBT Cancer Network. "For decades, the targeted marketing of these products, combined with the experiences of homophobia and transphobia and a lack of access to health resources, has continued to make this a social justice issue."

The deceptive tactics used by Big Tobacco were first uncovered through an internal marketing plan titled “Project SCUM (Subculture Urban Marketing),” which was intended to boost cigarette sales to the gay community and people who are unstably housed/homeless.1,3,4 Although the name alone is indicative of how Big Tobacco views this population, the industry continues to infiltrate LGBT communities by advertising in gay publications; sponsoring Pride events, street fairs and film festivals; and funding HIV/AIDS service organizations.2,3,4

The tobacco industry’s deceptive marketing tactics have been shown to influence and encourage menthol cigarette use among the LGBTQIA+ community.5 In fact, statistics show that:

* Approximately 36% of LGBT smokers report smoking menthol cigarettes compared to 29% of heterosexual smokers.4
* Nearly 1 in 6 (16.1%) lesbian, gay and bisexual adults smokes cigarettes, compared with nearly 1 in 8 (12.3%) straight adults.6,7
* Cigarette smoking is higher among transgender adults (35.5%) than those whose gender identity corresponds with their birth sex.7

The “It’s Not Just” campaign, first launched in May 2021, draws attention to the tobacco industry’s manipulative marketing of menthol-flavored tobacco products to specific communities. The first two waves of the campaign focused on the industry’s impact on African Americans and youth. The campaign includes alarming statistics and direct quotes from tobacco executives, as well as powerful, emotional imagery of people who are reflective of the communities disproportionately impacted by Big Tobacco’s deceptive marketing. Individuals can learn more about how to help fight the injustice of menthol-flavored tobacco products at the campaign’s website: [NotJustMenthol.org](https://notjustmenthol.org/).

Additional statistics:

* Tobacco marketing
  + A higher density of tobacco retailer outlets has been found in areas where greater numbers of LGBTQ+ couples live.8
* Tobacco usage
  + LGBT adults spend more than $2.6 billion on cigarettes each year.9
  + LGBT youth may be at high risk for tobacco use, given risk factors such as lack of support from family, friends and peers; depression; low self-esteem; and stressful life situations related to coming out.10
  + LGB youth who identify as female are three times more likely to use cigarettes and cigars and twice as likely to use e-cigarettes than youth who identify as female and heterosexual.11
  + More than 70% of gay and transgender youth who smoke use menthol cigarettes.1
* Health impact
  + In the United States alone, tobacco kills more people each year than alcohol, car accidents, suicide, AIDS, murder, illegal drugs and fire – combined.12
  + Smoking accelerates the onset of AIDS among people with HIV, and HIV accelerates smoking-induced emphysema.12, 13
  + Limited data exists to explore long-term health impacts of these tobacco-use disparities, highlighting the need for further examination of tobacco-related morbidity and mortality by sexual orientation.10
  + LGBTQIA+ individuals are less likely to have health insurance than non-LGBTQIA+ individuals, which may negatively affect health as well as access to cessation treatments, including counseling and medication.14
  + According to the independent Tobacco Products Scientific Advisory Committee, it’s estimated that 9 million more people will start smoking over the next 40 years due to the availability of menthol cigarettes. If this holds true, the majority of new smokers will be black, gay or transgender.1

**Support is available for New Yorkers who want to quit**

The New York State Smokers' Quitline is a confidential service for all New York State residents who wish to overcome tobacco use, including e-cigarettes. Free offerings include individualized coaching and assistance with quit-planning from highly trained Quit Coaches, text and chat support and free shipping of stop-smoking medications such as nicotine patches or nicotine gum for those 18 and older. Residents of all ages may contact the Quitline for support and educational materials. In addition, the Quitline encourages teens and young adults (ages 13-24) to text “DROPTHEVAPE” to 88709 to join “This Is Quitting,” a free texting support program for help with quitting vaping. Visit [nysmokefree.com](http://nysmokefree.com) anytime for more information or call 1-866-NY-QUITS (1-866-697-8487) seven days a week, beginning at 9 a.m.

Tobacco Free New York State and Reality Check student groups around the state work tirelessly to educate local communities on the tobacco industry’s use of menthol and other flavored tobacco products as a tool to target, attract and addict new smokers. Tobacco Free New York State, including the Reality Check student youth groups, is part of the New York State Tobacco Control Program.

**About Tobacco Free NYS**

The New York State Tobacco Control Program funds 21 community organizations across the state to work toward Advancing Tobacco-Free Communities. We educate community leaders and the public about the dangers and social injustice of tobacco marketing and engage local stakeholders to promote community changes that limit the tobacco industry’s presence, de-normalize tobacco use and eliminate secondhand smoke. Find out more at [tobaccofreenys.org](https://tobaccofreenys.org/).

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*LGB/LGBT/LGBT+/LGBTQ+/LGBTQIA+ are all acronyms for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex and asexual or allied. In NYS, we prefer the acronym LGBTQIA+ as the most inclusive way to acknowledge and respect the diversity of bodies, genders and relationships. The majority of sources cited here use the same or similar inclusive acronyms; for specific usages, refer to individual sources linked here.*

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