Public Health Solutions | NYC SMOKE-FREE

LGBTQ+ TOBACCO DISPARITIES

While overall smoking rates across NYC have decreased, significant disparities still exist among the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community. NYC Smoke-Free, a program of Public Health Solutions, works to ensure all communities have the resources they need to be smoke-free.

TOBACCO USE IS PREVALENT IN LGBT COMMUNITIES

The tobacco epidemic continues to have a devastating effect on New Yorkers, with over 22,000 — 12,000 in NYC — dying from smoking-related illnesses every year. Yet, tobacco use and its negative health effects disproportionately impact LGBT populations.

- About 1 in 6 (15.3%) of lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults smoke cigarettes, compared with about 1 in 9 (11.4%) of heterosexual/straight adults.
- Cigarette smoking is 35% higher among transgender adults, than among adults whose gender identity corresponds with their birth sex.
- Tobacco companies advertise heavily in publications with gay and lesbian readership, often using images that show LGBTQ+ people using tobacco as a “normal” part of life.

PERSISTING CHALLENGES SERVE AS BARRIERS TO QUITTING

LGBT populations face countless challenges including discrimination, peer pressure, rejection by family and friends, poverty, and limited access to health care and insurance — all of which make it more difficult to quit smoking and lead healthy lives.

- Lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals are 5 times less likely to call a smoking cessation quitline
- Gay, bisexual, and transgender men are 17% less aware of smoking quit lines than straight men.
- Only 28% of LGBT people use nicotine replacement therapy — even when covered by insurance

BIG TOBACCO HEAVILY TARGETS THE LGBT COMMUNITY

For decades, the tobacco industry has targeted LGBT populations through advertisements and sponsorships, including at the NYC Pride March. This translates to positive affiliations with tobacco use and compromises anti-smoking efforts directed towards this community.

1990

TOBACCO COMPANIES BEGIN ADVERTISING IN OUTLETS FOCUSED ON THE LGBT COMMUNITY — DEPICTING TOBACCO AS A NORMAL PART OF LGBT LIFE

1991

TOBACCO COMPANY PHILLIP MORRIS PLEDGES LARGE DONATIONS TO AIDS RESEARCH AND PROGRAMS—FAVORABLY POSITIONING THEM AMONG THE LGBT COMMUNITY

1995

TOBACCO COMPANY R.J. REYNOLDS CREATES THE PROJECT SUB-CULTURE URBAN MARKETING (SCUM) STRATEGY TO BOOST CIGARETTE SALES BY TARGETING GAY MEN AND HOMELESS INDIVIDUALS

2020

USE OF ANY COMMERCIAL TOBACCO PRODUCT WAS HIGHER AMONG LESBIAN, GAY, OR BISEXUAL ADULTS, COMPARED TO HETEROSEXUAL/STRAIGHT ADULTS (25.1% VS 18.8%)

2021

17.4% OF GAY, LESBIAN, OR BISEXUAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS CURRENTLY USED ANY TOBACCO PRODUCT—COMPARED TO 11.4% OF HETEROSEXUAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS.

THE RISE OF MENTHOL

Although overall smoking rates are on the decline, menthol smoking continues to rise—creating more nicotine-dependent smokers who are less likely to quit. The LGBT community in particular is turning to menthol smoking at an increasing rate.

- Menthol cigarettes comprised approximately 33% of total cigarette pack sales during 2018-2022.
- 36% of LGBT smokers use menthol cigarettes — compared to 29% of straight smokers
- 43% of LGBT women smokers use menthol cigarettes — compared to 32% of straight women smokers