


COMMENTARY

Strengthening Our Commitment to Help End Tobacco Use

Five years ago, CVS Health stopped selling cigarettes and tobacco products. Now we're expanding our goal.

By Troyen Brennan and Eileen Howard Boone Sept. 3, 2019



CVS Health and the CVS Health Foundation announced a multi-year \$50 million Be The First initiative to help create the first tobacco-free generation.  (ALASTAIR PIKE/AFP/GETTY IMAGES)

FIVE YEARS AGO, WE decided to stop selling cigarettes and tobacco products in all CVS Pharmacy locations. It was the first step toward building an innovative health care company driven by a purpose — helping people on their path to better health. Since then,

CVS Health and the CVS Health Foundation announced a multi-year \$50 million Be The First initiative to help create the first tobacco-free generation.

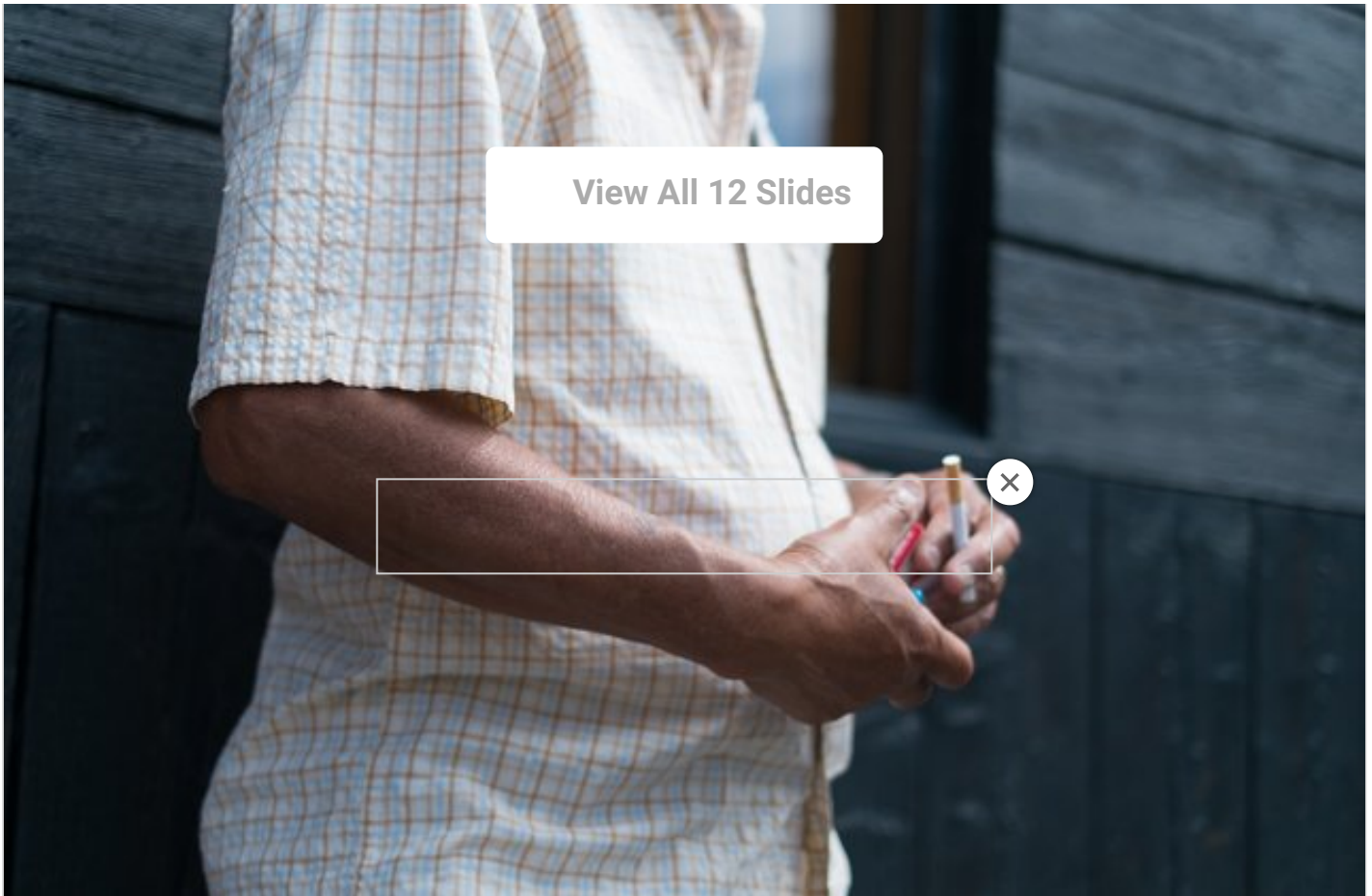
[**READ:** [Officials Warn Not to Use Street E-Cig or Vaping Products](#)]

On the anniversary of our original decision, we are expanding the program to tackle the growing problem of youth vaping with additional investments and new partners. We're also bringing our smoking cessation expertise to areas across our businesses, with an expanded focus in 2020 on increasing effective smoking cessation approaches in Medicaid plans, including in Aetna Better Health managed Medicaid plans and together with CVS Caremark clients interested in creating or expanding smoking cessation efforts for their Medicaid members.

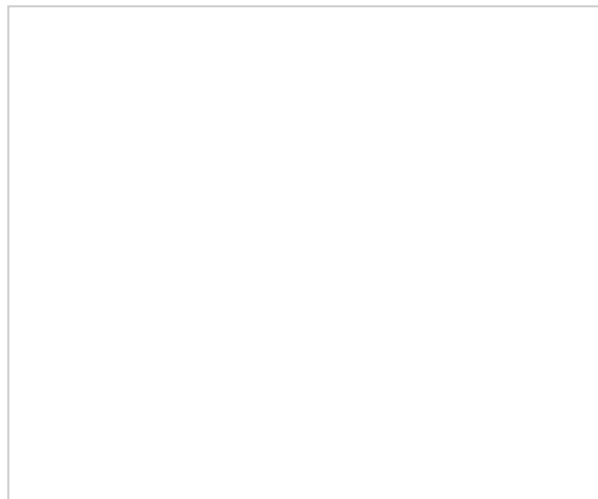
Demonstrable Positive Impact on Tobacco Use

Our decision to stop selling tobacco led to a meaningful and measurable decline in cigarette smoking. Within 12 months, in states where CVS Pharmacy had at least 15% of the market share, consumers had purchased [100 million fewer packs of cigarettes](#), according to research we published in the American Journal of Public Health (AJPH) in 2017. Households that purchased cigarettes exclusively at CVS Pharmacy were 38% more likely to stop buying cigarettes, and those consumers who bought more than three packs of cigarettes a month were more than twice as likely to stop buying them.

Here's Where People Want to Quit Smoking the Most



These findings clearly indicate the positive public health impact of our decision. It is also significant because even though cigarette smoking has been on the decline, many consumers still struggle with nicotine use. In a [recent CVS Health research study](#), 39% of consumers said they, or a family member or friend, have struggled with nicotine use — such as cigarettes or vaping — in the past five years. Of consumers aged 35 to 50, nearly half — 45%— said they struggle with nicotine use, and 40% of millennials said they did as well.



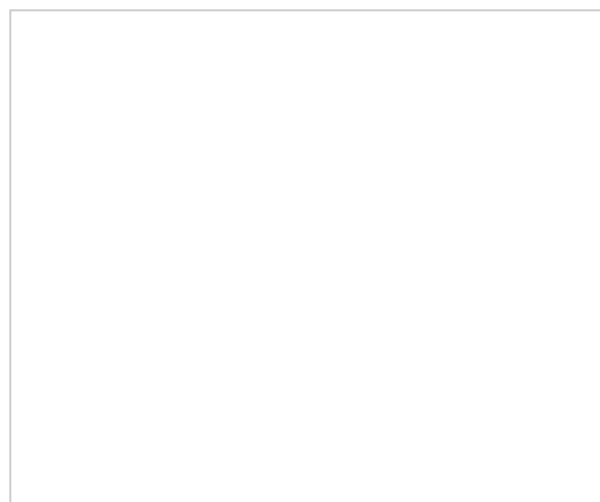
Cigarette smoking continues to be responsible for more than 480,000 deaths per year in the U.S. The total economic cost of smoking is [more than \\$300 billion a year](#). Clearly, more needs to be done to help our country quit tobacco. If other key stakeholders join us in making the decision to exit tobacco, we have the opportunity to make an even more profound public health impact.

Vaping: an Emerging and Growing Threat

Even as cigarette smoking has been on the decline, use of e-cigarette, or vaping, products – introduced as alternatives to cigarette smoking and often marketed as a "safer" option by manufacturers – has been on the rise. This is concerning because there is [increasing evidence](#) that [vaping poses serious health risks](#). According to the [2018 National Youth Tobacco Survey](#), 3.6 million middle and high school students were e-cigarette users, a dramatic increase from the more than 1.5 million students the previous year. This represents a 78% increase among high school students, and a 48% increase among middle school students.

[**READ:** [The Vaping Injuries Regulators Missed](#)]

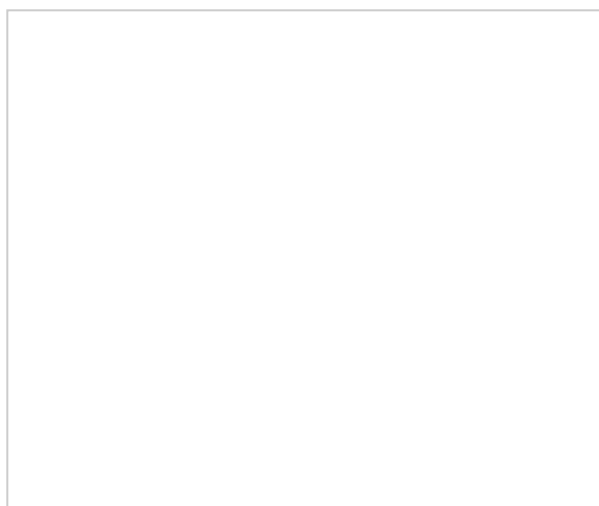
What's even more disturbing is that the risks of vaping may not be well known or understood. Each day, we are learning more about the [potential adverse health effects](#) that may be linked to vaping. Findings from a Morning Consult survey, sponsored by CVS Health, show that nearly eight in 10 Americans consider tobacco to be very harmful to one's health, while just over half – 52%— consider vaping very harmful to one's health.



Working to Reduce All Tobacco Use

As a health care innovation company, and as a reflection of our purpose to help people on their path to better health, we do not sell vaping products at any CVS Pharmacy location. After years of decline in the youth smoking rate, today young adults who use e-cigarettes are four times more likely to begin smoking traditional cigarettes. That's why we are expanding our focus to aggressively tackle this growing epidemic with new partnerships and funding.

Today, the Aetna Foundation is pledging an additional \$2 million to provide educational materials and tools to prevent smoking and vaping to thousands of clinicians who are part of organizations such as the American Academy of Pediatrics, the National Medical Association and the National Association of School Nurses. This builds on a \$10 million commitment announced in June to combat vaping. As part of that effort, the CVS Health Foundation is partnering with Discovery Education and the CATCH Global Foundation, to create an educational curriculum on the dangers of vaping for middle school students that will be made available to every school district in the U.S. These resources will also be made available to parents at no cost. These anti-vaping initiatives build on the accomplishments of the Be The First program to date, including reaching nearly 13 million young people, helping more than 200 colleges and universities in their efforts to go tobacco free, and funding the first-ever vaping cessation program in partnership with the Truth Initiative.



[**MORE:** [Illinois Patient's Death May Be First in US Tied to Vaping](#)]

As we look to 2020, we plan to expand our tobacco-cessation expertise, particularly within the Medicaid program where smoking rates are considerably higher than among all adults. More than a quarter (25.3%) of all Medicaid enrollees smoke compared to 11.8% of people enrolled in private insurance, [according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). A recent study by University of California, San Francisco also found that reducing smoking and its associated health effects among Medicaid recipients in each state by just 1% would save the Medicaid program [an estimated \\$2.6 billion](#) within one year.

Ending tobacco sales and addressing the e-cigarette epidemic are just the beginning of our broader effort to transform the delivery of health care, one individual and one community at a time. By proactively addressing consumer health needs, we are building a transformative health care company that will engage consumers when and where they need care, help people achieve better health at a lower cost and help simplify a complicated health care system.



Troyen Brennan, Contributor

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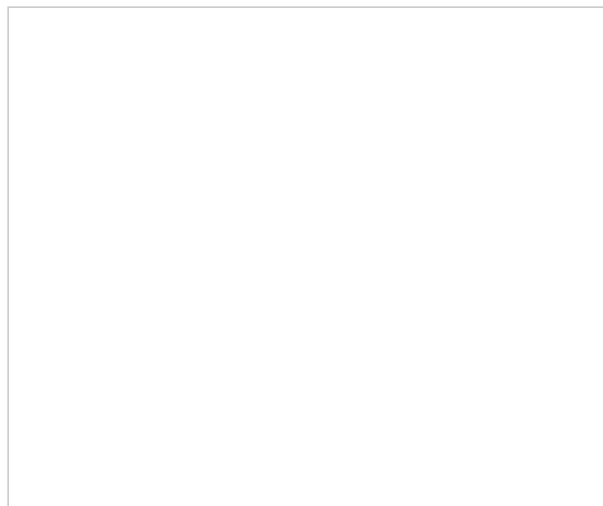
RECOMMENDED



SNAP Changes Will Affect States Unevenly

Mortality Rates Highest in Southern U.S.

Trump Administration Announcing Nearly \$2B in Opioid Grants



Nearly \$2B to Combat the Opioid Crisis

Asthma Rates Highest in Industrial Areas