

Raising the Age of Sale of Tobacco Products and the Military



Military leaders recognize the negative impact tobacco use has on the health of military personnel and on mission readiness. Unfortunately, smoking rates are higher among active duty military than among civiliansⁱ and tobacco companies consider members of the military to be an important and lucrative target market.ⁱⁱ Roughly 95 percent of adults who smoke started smoking before the age of 21, therefore young adults are a critical population to target with evidence-based tobacco control strategies.ⁱⁱⁱ Raising the age of sale of tobacco products to 21 can also help support existing efforts to prevent tobacco use and encourage cessation among members of the military.

Tobacco Use Affects Military Readiness

During the past 50 years, the U.S. Department of Defense's (DoD's) stance on tobacco has shifted markedly as evidence of the immediate health and readiness consequences of tobacco use has emerged. An Institute of Medicine (IOM) report on smoking in the military and veteran populations cited extensive research in its conclusion that tobacco negatively affects military readiness. Tobacco use reduces soldiers' physical fitness and endurance and is linked to higher rates of absenteeism and lost productivity.^{iv} The DoD estimated that 175,000 current active duty service members will die from smoking unless they are able to quit.^v In addition, the IOM report stated that the DoD spends more than \$1.6 billion per year on tobacco-related medical care, increased hospitalizations, and lost days of work.^{vi}

Military Leaders Support Tobacco Prevention and Cessation

Awareness of the impact of tobacco on mission readiness continues to drive expanded tobacco control policies within the DoD. The DoD and the Army, Navy, Marines, and Air Force have each set goals to become tobacco-free. In April 2016, Secretary of Defense Ash Carter issued a memorandum with plans to reduce tobacco use across the military including increasing the price of tobacco sold on military bases and widening smoke-free zones. After Hawaii raised its tobacco sale age to 21, Hawaii's military bases opted to comply with the higher age in recognition of its benefits to readiness, health and finances.^{vii} Retired military leaders support legislation in Illinois to raise the age of sale for tobacco to 21.^{viii}

"We see it as a fitness and readiness issue. When we can prevent sailors from smoking or using tobacco, if we can get them to quit, then that improves their fitness and readiness, and it saves them a ton of money too," Bill Doughty, spokesman for the Navy Region, Hawaii.

Raising the Age of Sale of Tobacco to 21 Will Help Our Military Remain Healthy

Permitting military exemptions to age 21 laws exposes our heroes to a deadly and costly addiction. Tobacco products cause disease and premature death when used as intended. We owe it to members of the military - particularly younger members - to protect them from a lifetime of addiction, diseases that could adversely affect their fitness and readiness, and premature death from tobacco use. Raising the minimum age for tobacco sales will help our military remain healthy and ready for duty.

ⁱ Department of Defense. Department of Defense Health Related Behaviors Survey of Active Military Personnel. 2011. http://www.murray.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/889efd07-2475-40ee-b3b0-508947957a0f/final-2011-hrb-active-duty-survey-report.pdf Duty Military Personnel. 2011. Institute of Medicine. Combating Tobacco Use in Military and Veteran Populations. June 2009.

ⁱⁱ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Health Consequences of Smoking – 50 Years of Progress: A Report of the Surgeon General. Atlanta: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Office on Smoking and Health, 2014

ⁱⁱⁱ United States Department of Health and Human Services. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2014. ICPSR36361-v1. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2016-03-22. <http://doi.org/10.3886/ICPSR36361.v1>; see also Institute of Medicine, *Public Health Implications of Raising the Minimum Age of Legal Access to Tobacco Products*, Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2015, <http://iom.nationalacademies.org/Reports/2015/TobaccoMinimumAgeReport.aspx>

^{iv} Institute of Medicine. Combating Tobacco Use in Military and Veteran Populations. June 2009

^v Department of Defense, Memorandum re: Reducing Tobacco Use in the Armed Forces and Department of Defense, March 14, 2014.

^{vi} Institute of Medicine. Combating Tobacco Use in Military and Veteran Populations. June 2009.

^{vii} Bussewitz, Cathy. Associated Press. "Hawaii Raises Smoking Age to 21; Military Supports New Law." December 31, 2015.

^{viii} Mission: Readiness, Military Leaders for Kids, *Letter in support of IL SB3011 to raise the tobacco sale age to 21*, April 19, 2016