



Tobacco Use: Lethal & Addictive, And a Threat to Our Military

The minimum age of military service does not equal readiness to enlist in a lifetime of nicotine addiction. Tobacco use is not a sign of adulthood, but does come with lasting health effects that extend well into adulthood. Tobacco companies target young people before they can fully appreciate the consequences of becoming addicted to the nicotine in tobacco.

THE FALSE MILITARY ANALOGY ("IF YOU'RE OLD ENOUGH TO FIGHT ...")

Military leaders themselves recognize the toll tobacco takes on troop readiness and on the military health care system and are actively taking steps to reduce tobacco use in the military. The Department of Defense (DoD) estimates that 175,000 current active duty service members will die from smoking unless they are able to quit. Almost all smokers start smoking before the age of 21, and the ages of 18 to 21 are a critical period when many smokers move from experimental smoking to regular, daily use.

Tobacco companies have a long history of promoting tobacco to members of the military and have a vested interest in tobacco use by the military, an important market for recruitment of the next generation of smokers. Raising the tobacco age to 21 will help prevent our service members from starting to use this deadly and addictive product and support DoD efforts to reduce tobacco use among service members.



"Why would we pass a law that protects our youth and deny the military the benefit of the law? Without exception, military retirees are taken aback. They have our backs. The least we can do is help them not get started with cigarettes. Let's protect them and give them a chance at a healthy life."

— Brian Hayden, veteran

Alarming, many current military smokers — 36 to 40 percent — report starting tobacco use after joining the military. Given everything we know about what smoking does to the body and how it weakens our combat preparedness, it is unacceptable that troops smoke at higher rates than the general population.

TOBACCO USE HURTS MILITARY READINESS AND IS COSTLY

While tobacco use takes an enormous toll on all users, it has particularly detrimental consequences for active duty military personnel. Tobacco use reduces physical fitness and endurance and is linked to higher rates of absenteeism and lost productivity. In addition, service members who use tobacco are more likely to drop out of basic training, sustain injuries and have poor vision, all of which compromise troop readiness. Tobacco use places a significant burden on the DoD, which spends more than \$1.6 billion each year on tobacco-related medical care, increased hospitalizations and lost days of work.

MILITARY LEADERS SUPPORT TOBACCO PREVENTION AND CESSATION

The military recognizes the negative impact of tobacco on military preparedness and troop health and has initiated a series of actions to curb tobacco use in the military. DoD, the Army, Navy, Marines and Air Force have each set goals to become tobacco-free.