

Talk It Up. Lock It Up!™ Column

National Progress in Reducing E-cigarette Use among Youth

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Between 2011 - 2015, our nation saw an almost 900% increase in electronic cigarette (e-cigarette) usage.¹ Recently, for the first time in five years, we have seen nearly 5% decrease among youth across the nation using e-cigarettes. Despite these reductions, youth using e-cigarettes could fill the North Carolina's Panthers stadium more than ten times.

We can be encouraged and applaud the work of our nation's diligent public health professionals, school staff, healthcare providers, and youth peer educators who employ evidence-based strategies to prevent and reduce use of e-cigarettes. These strategies include providing parents, school staff, and mentors with reliable scientific information about the health risks of e-cigarettes, providing technical assistance for policy development, and referring to cessation resources like the toll-free NC Quitline (1-800-QUIT-NOW). But our work is far from done. Even while we are encouraged by this reduction, we must remember that it still leaves more than 1 in every 10 of our nation's middle and high schoolers using e-cigarettes, and they deserve our continued efforts.

Philip Morris International, the largest cigarette manufacturer in the United States and maker of Marlboro, will be spending \$320 million to open a facility in Germany to make e-cigarettes—that is almost five times more than we spend on tobacco prevention nationally.

And it is not just about the nation's youth, it is about the kids who are in our very own neighborhoods, riding the bus with our kids, serving us in our smoke-free restaurants and bars. Just days ago, our State Legislature allocated \$500,000 to tobacco use prevention, which includes developing strategies to prevent the use of electronic cigarettes by youth. This is the first time youth prevention has been funded in the state budget in five years.

Deficits in funding have not discouraged our state's Tobacco Prevention and Control professionals, and Orange County has never strayed away from committing to youth prevention. Orange County employs a Local Tobacco Prevention and Control Coordinator, one of only three across the state, and continues to provide modest funds to support TRU (Tobacco. Reality. Unfiltered.) clubs in all five of the high schools to use peer education to aid in youth prevention and policy advocacy. That commitment makes way for a group of five of our TRU Peer Educators from Orange High School to attend the Truth Initiative's National Summit on Youth Activism in Washington, DC. This group, calling themselves the Menthol Exterminators, was selected from a highly competitive pool of applicants to attend this summit for free. We look forward to reporting back on their experience upon their return and learning from them what we can do to further reduce tobacco use by youth.

¹ 2011-2016 National Youth Tobacco Survey, conducted by the federal government

We hope that when North Carolina conducts their Youth Risk Behavior Survey in 2017 we will see similar reductions in youth e-cigarette usage. We thank North Carolina's State Legislature for using its budget to protect our youth from a lifelong addiction to nicotine. We are encouraged by this renewed investment and hope that we will see a full restoration of the \$17 million budget that once allowed for an evidence-based, nationally renowned statewide youth tobacco prevention program in North Carolina. The tobacco industry continues to invest in their products, and for that reason, we must continue to invest in the health of our youth.