

October 15, 2019

The Honorable Anna Eshoo
Chair
House Energy and Commerce
Health Subcommittee
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Michael C. Burgess
Ranking Member
House Energy and Commerce
Health Subcommittee
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Eshoo and Ranking Member Burgess:

On behalf of the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) and the nearly 3,000 local health departments across the country, I write today to thank the committee for holding the hearing, on “Legislation to Reverse the Youth Tobacco Epidemic.” NACCHO represents our nation’s county, city, metropolitan, district, and tribal health departments that are on the front lines of addressing tobacco use—including vaping and e-cigarette—each day.

Any tobacco product use, including e-cigarettes and other nicotine products, is unsafe, especially for youth. However, youth trends in tobacco use are going in the wrong direction. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has reported that in 2018 more than 1 in 4 (27%) high school students and more than 1 in 20 (7.2%) middle school students reported using an e-cigarette in the last 30 daysⁱ. Even more concerning, among current tobacco product users, about 2 in 5 (1.68 million) high school students and 1 in 3 (270,000) middle school students used two or more tobacco products in 2018ⁱⁱ. E-cigarettes were the most commonly reported product used in combination with other tobacco products among both middle and high school students. While we are seeing trends of e-cigarette use skyrocketing among youth, the Journal of the American Medical Association reported e-cigarette use in adults, the intended users of the products, has remained stable and even showed signs of decline in useⁱⁱⁱ.

Local health departments are key partners with the healthcare system and non-governmental organizations to protect the health and well-being of their community and are instrumental in ensuring public awareness about the dangers of tobacco use, including e-cigarettes, particularly among youth. For example, NACCHO’s recently released report, [Tobacco Control Efforts in Rural America: Perspectives from Local Health Departments](#), found that nearly all respondents (90%) reported engaging in tobacco and cessation activities and initiatives in the community, including education, referrals to Quitlines, social marketing campaigns, and cessation support groups. This same study highlighted the particular challenge of e-cigarette use to their regions, with 93% of respondents noting that e-cigarettes were a threat in their communities. These numbers reinforce what we are hearing from health departments of all sizes across the country: youth e-cigarette use is a big problem getting bigger. Local health departments are tackling this issue through both programmatic and policy channels by raising awareness and disseminating educational materials, providing support to parents and schools, ensuring local policies support tobacco-free kids, and continuing to promote evidence-based approaches to combat use among youth.

While addressing the increases in youth e-cigarette use, public health departments are also currently working to address an outbreak of lung illnesses related to vaping that has hospitalized 1,299 people




and caused at least 26 deaths. While the causes of these illnesses are still under investigation, local health departments are working with their state and federal counterparts to raise awareness of the potential dangers of e-cigarette use, educate local health care providers about the warning signs, and track down evidence to help identify the root cause(s) of the outbreak. While these illnesses are not exclusive to the youth population, it is important to note that more than half of those cases identified have been in people under the age of 25, with 16% of cases being found in minors under the age of 18.

The alarming rise in e-cigarette use among youth calls for immediate federal action. Reports show that flavorings in e-cigarettes are a main contributor to the rise and appeal of vaping in our youth, which is why NACCHO supports a ban of these products. Moreover, more education is needed at the local level to inform parents and children about the dangers of nicotine on the developing brain and damage caused to the lungs by inhalation of dangerous, highly addictive substances. We also need to ensure that there are programs and services available to help youth who are addicted to these products to quit—something that is receiving far too little public attention. And we call on Congress to do all it can to reduce the availability, appeal, and use of e-cigarettes among youth to protect them from the dangers of nicotine and vaping. That is why NACCHO supports the, “Reversing the Youth Tobacco Epidemic Act of 2019,” introduced by Chairman Frank Pallone and Rep. Donna Shalala, which would, among other things, ensure that newly deemed tobacco products are held to the same advertising standards of traditional cigarettes, raise the minimum purchasing age to 21, and prohibit flavoring of tobacco products.

Thank you for your leadership on this issue. For more information, please contact Adriane Casalotti, NACCHO’s Chief of Government and Public Affairs at acasalotti@naccho.org.

Sincerely,



Lori Tremmel Freeman. MBA
Chief Executive Officer

ⁱ Gentzke AS, Creamer M, Cullen KA, et al. *Vital Signs: Tobacco Product Use Among Middle and High School Students — United States, 2011–2018*. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2019;68:157–164. February 2019. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6806e1>.

ⁱⁱ *ibid.*

ⁱⁱⁱ Dai H, Leventhal AM. Prevalence of e-Cigarette Use Among Adults in the United States, 2014–2018. *JAMA*. Published online September 16, 2019. doi:10.1001/jama.2019.15331.

