

MS lags behind nation in policy efforts to prevent and reduce tobacco use

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Mississippi is listed as one of the states with the worst policies to prevent and reduce tobacco use, according to the American Lung Association's 21st annual "State of Tobacco Control" report, which was released recently. The state earned all failing grades on this year's report.

The "State of Tobacco Control" report evaluates state and federal policies on actions taken to eliminate tobacco use and recommends proven-effective tobacco control laws and policies to save lives. This is critical, as tobacco use remains the leading cause of preventable death and disease in America and takes the lives of 5,410 Mississippi residents each year.

"Mississippi lags behind when it comes to tobacco control policies, and, as a result, we have higher than average adult smoking rates, at 19.6%, and 27.6% of high school students use a tobacco product," said Ashley Lyerly, Senior Director of Advocacy at the American Lung Association in Mississippi. "This gives us an important opportunity to improve the health of our state through proven policies, such as ensuring smokefree protections for all Mississippi residents in all workplaces, including bars, restaurants and gaming establishments."

Mississippi's Grades

The "State of Tobacco Control" report grades states and the District of Columbia in five areas that have been proven to prevent and reduce tobacco use and save lives. In the 2023 report, Mississippi received an F grade in the following areas:

1. Funding for State Tobacco Prevention Programs
2. Strength of Smokefree Workplace Laws
3. Level of State Tobacco Taxes

4. Coverage and Access to Services to Quit Tobacco
5. Ending the Sale of All Flavored Tobacco Products

This year's report noted the need for Mississippi policymakers to focus on passing a comprehensive smoke-free law. The U.S. Surgeon General has concluded there is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke. Passing a comprehensive smokefree law that eliminates smoking in all public places and workplaces, includ-



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ing restaurants, bars and casinos, would protect workers across the state from deadly secondhand smoke. E-cigarettes must also be included in comprehensive smokefree laws, given the harmful emissions that come from them.

Mississippi lawmakers should ensure access to all U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-approved quit smoking treatments for state residents. Nearly seven out of ten smokers want to quit, but nicotine is highly addictive. Quitting is difficult and despite the high number of smokers that want to quit, only about 7% of them currently do. Mississippi lawmakers can help residents quit tobacco by covering all quit smoking treatments in its Medicaid program and for state employees.

This should include access to all seven FDA-approved tobacco cessation medications and all three forms of counseling without barriers, such as copays and prior authorization. It's also essential to increase the reach of Mississippi's Quitline or phone counseling service to help tobacco users quit.

Federal Grades Overview

The report also grades the federal government on their efforts to eliminate tobacco use. This year, there were new steps taken by the government to prevent and reduce tobacco use, including proposed rules to end the sale of menthol cigarettes and flavored cigars, Congress passing a law requiring the FDA to regulate tobacco products made with synthetic nicotine, and increased federal enforcement of the Tobacco Control Act. As a result of these steps forward, the federal government's grade for "Federal Regulation of Tobacco Products" improved from a "D" grade last year, to a "C" grade in the 2023 report.

The 2023 "State of Tobacco Control" report grades the federal government in five areas:

- Federal Government Regulation of Tobacco Products – Grade C
- Federal Coverage of Quit Smoking Treatments – Grade D
- Level of Federal Tobacco Taxes – Grade F
- Federal Mass Media Campaigns to Prevent and Reduce Tobacco Use – Grade A
- Federal Minimum Age of Sale for Tobacco Products to 21 – Incomplete

FDA is overdue in publishing the final Tobacco 21 regulations as required by statute, which is why it earns an "incomplete."

To learn more about this year's "State of Tobacco Control" grades and take action, visit Lung.org/sotc.



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