

NCI TOBACCO CONTROL MONOGRAPH SERIES

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Information for the Media

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN PROMOTING AND REDUCING TOBACCO USE

MONOGRAPH NINETEEN

19

In the twentieth century, mass media helped create new generations of tobacco users even as evidence mounted about tobacco's terrible toll on health. This monograph, *The Role of the Media in Promoting and Reducing Tobacco Use*, presented by the National Cancer Institute, comes at a critical time as both the tobacco industry and public health advocates seek to use more diverse forms of media to influence tobacco use. Despite a roughly 50% decline in adult smoking prevalence over the past 40 years, about one in five Americans continues to smoke, and more than 4,000 young people smoke their first cigarette each day.


This monograph provides a comprehensive review of the scientific literature from several disciplines to analyze media strategies that promote or reduce tobacco use. In addition, the monograph explores and recommends strategies to leverage the media to best serve the public health in this high-stakes arena.

A fundamental theme in this monograph is the dynamic interplay between the forces that work to promote tobacco use and those that work to control or prevent it. For example, whereas tobacco control media campaigns warn about the dangers of smoking, smoking proponents send out the message that smoking confers social status, athleticism, and glamour.

Key findings in the monograph include:

- Much tobacco advertising targets the needs of adolescents, who can be influenced by even brief exposure to tobacco advertising.
- There is a causal relationship between tobacco advertising and promotion and increased tobacco use. Substantial evidence from the United States and other countries shows that partial bans on tobacco advertising do not work because the industry modifies its use of the media—for example, by expanding point-of-sale advertising and promotions on the Internet. Therefore, comprehensive bans on tobacco advertising and promotion need to be considered.
- Canadian and European restrictions on tobacco marketing are stronger than those in the United States.

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- Smoking is pervasive in the movies, occurring in three-quarters or more of contemporary box-office hits. Smoking is more common in adult-rated movies. There is evidence of a causal relationship between exposure to tobacco use in movies and youth smoking initiation.
 - Media campaigns to prevent and control tobacco use can reduce smoking. Antitobacco advertising with strong negative messages works better in reaching audiences; messages that use humor or other tactics are less successful. In contrast, antitobacco youth campaigns sponsored by the tobacco industry are not effective and may even increase smoking among adolescents.
 - Organized media advocacy efforts on behalf of the tobacco control community generally lack sufficient resources. Very little is known about how the content and volume of news coverage related to tobacco affects attitudes and behavior.

This monograph begins the important process of understanding how the power of the mass media is used to influence tobacco use—especially among those who are most vulnerable, such as youth. Despite considerable success for proponents of tobacco control, tobacco use still accounts for nearly one-third of cancer deaths worldwide, and tobacco-attributable mortality is predicted to increase in the coming decades if current smoking patterns continue. If this trend is to be stopped, an in-depth understanding of the media’s power for both tobacco control and tobacco promotion needs to help guide the way.

About the NCI Tobacco Control Monograph Series

The National Cancer Institute established the Tobacco Control Monograph series in 1991 to provide ongoing and timely information about emerging issues in smoking and tobacco prevention and control. Monographs are available at no cost in print and online.

For More Information

For more information or to order this monograph, go to <http://www.cancercontrol.cancer.gov/tcrb/monographs/19/index.html>. To order a free copy, call the NCI Cancer Information Service at 1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237) and ask for NIH Publication No. 07-6242.