



CALIFORNIA TOBACCO ENDGAME CENTER FOR ORGANIZING AND ENGAGEMENT

A project of the American Heart Association®

Success Story

December 2020

Capitol Information and Education 2020 Goes Virtual Breaking New Ground

Watch the recap and view materials [here!!](#)

At a Glance

After COVID-19 restrictions cancelled the in-person 2020 Capitol Information & Education Day (I&E Day), the Tobacco Endgame Center for Organization and Engagement (Center) with the I&E Day Workgroup converted the annual event to a virtual experience, providing the tobacco control community with the tools to effectively advocate for tobacco issues with state legislators in an new format. The event included morning and afternoon sessions and meetings with six legislative caucuses. Participants were encouraged to engage in social media activities and posting throughout the event.

“Once again, the California tobacco control community proved that it will rise to the occasion and meet the challenges before it, whether it’s the cigarette and vaping industry or a global pandemic,” said Paul Kneprath, Director of the Tobacco Endgame Center for Organizing and Engagement. “The virtual day of action allowed many more members of the community from across the state to raise their voices against tobacco than the traditional in-person Capitol event.”

About I&E Days

Capitol I&E Day is an important annual event for California’s tobacco community on many levels. The historically daylong gathering provides an opportunity for California Tobacco Control Program-funded projects, agencies and staff statewide, to get updates on key issues, training in communicating with policymakers and to learn about what other communities around the state are doing to advance tobacco control. It provides an opportunity for participants to meet with their legislators, allowing them to raise awareness about work in their communities, learn about legislative challenges first-hand and establish a relationship for future engagement.

KEEPING THE MOMENTUM DURING COVID-19

HOW WE CONNECTED
WITH MORE THAN 400
MEMBERS OF THE
TOBACCO CONTROL
COMMUNITY IN A TIME
WHERE WE COULDN'T BE
"TOGETHER"

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I&E Day 2020: Unique Challenges

A major issue the I&E Day Workgroup had to address was whether tobacco and vaping messages would resonate with Legislature, which was grappling with the public health crisis created by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. As COVID-19 cases increased across the U.S. and the globe, a growing body of media stories and information generated by California Tobacco Control Program/California Department of Public Health linked COVID-19 complications and tobacco, offering both urgency and relevancy to raising tobacco issues through a virtual I&E event. After much consultation with the Workgroup, CTCP and our tobacco control advocacy partners, I&E 2020 was re-branded as the Virtual Day of Action (VDOA) and scheduled June 16, 2020, giving organizers just one month to plan.

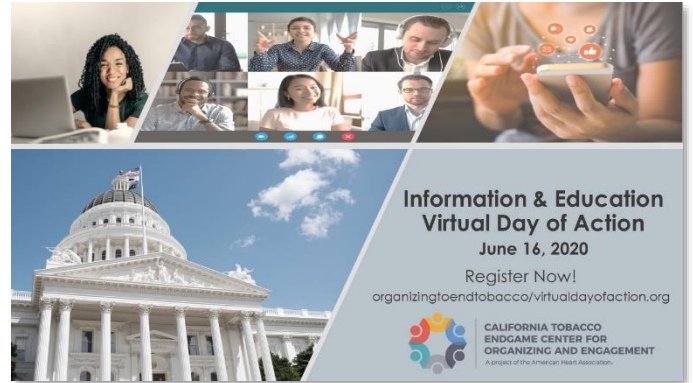
“It was a question of how do you take an event that is supposed to be in-person and make it be virtual and still have them walk away with that same excitement and same sense of accomplishment and unity within the tobacco control community and movement,” said Eric Batch, Vice President of Advocacy for the American Heart Association. “All of that was something that had to be figured out.”

“It was a learning curve all around – there’s just no other way to put it,” said Hernandez, who works as a Senior Director of Programs for the California Health Collaborative.

Approach

Building a Familiar Structure

Using Zoom as the virtual platform, the event was structured to mirror the in-person event as much as possible. An opening morning session featured appearances by key legislators, including Assembly Health Committee Chair Jim Wood and long-time tobacco control champion Senator Jerry Hill. The morning session also included a training on



messaging, social media and communicating with legislators.

The morning was followed by six separate legislative caucus meetings by smaller groups. Participants ended the day with a Zoom session in the late afternoon to celebrate the day, hear personal stories and to watch a rough-cut video of the day’s activities.

Planners needed to prepare for challenges that a virtual format may present. While veteran participants would be looking for familiar experiences, first-time attendees would require more assistance to navigate the rules of engagement with legislators to focus on education rather than lobbying, said Evi Hernandez, a Workgroup member who has spent nearly two decades working on tobacco issues. Additionally, he added, the Workgroup itself had a mix of new and veteran members and a new staff with the American Heart Association.

Strategizing Community Participation

Due to time constraints and concerns that legislators may be unwilling to accept meetings that were not directly related to a response to the unfolding public health crisis, the Center set up meetings with the Legislative Black Caucus, Latino Legislative Caucus, Legislative LGBTQ Caucus, Legislative Environmental Caucus, Asian Pacific Islander Legislative Caucus, Legislative Women’s Caucus, and the Legislative Rural Caucus. The Caucus meetings have been a staple of I&E Day historically and enabled participants to



elevate key tobacco issues within the frame of specific population-based impacts.

Meeting with the caucuses required additional coordination to navigate the new format with so many players. The Latino caucus meeting, for example, had well over 100 participants, something that made an impact because it included organizations from across the state, Hernandez said. To facilitate participation with the group – which typically may have been limited to 10-15 people – planners held a 30-minute training on key messages and engagement so those in attendance could share their stories with caucus leaders.

“Many of them were participating in this event for the first time and I think many of them benefited from the opportunity to know what it is like to sit in with a representative of a state legislature and talk about things that were important to them and have those legislators give them honest feedback about what they thought about the situation,” Hernandez said.

Integrating Social Media Strategy

Social media is an important tool for broadening reach of any event, but especially for one happening virtually. During the event’s morning session, the Center provided a social media training overview, explaining key messages, how to use post templates, and encouraging participants to help create a “social media storm” with tobacco control messaging.

Messaging was designed around four themes focused on the need for more work in the fight against tobacco use, disproportionate impact on communities of color, links to complications with COVID-19 and the teen vaping epidemic. Additional messaging focused on priority populations was developed for participant use.

Throughout the day, participants were encouraged to post on all social media platforms using the hashtag #VoicesAgainstTobacco. The center also sent an email blast at noon on event day reminding everyone to post at that time. The social media posts were pulled into a digital wall temporarily housed on the Center’s website, enabling attendees to monitor activity.

Building Engagement

Batch said the virtual format increased accessibility for the event for organizations who may not have been able to travel, even without COVID-19 restrictions.

“Because they were able to click on a Zoom link, they were able to be a full participant,” Batch said.

Dian Kiser, Project Director for the Health and Social Policy Institute, who has spent 35 years working in tobacco control, said the event succeeded at keeping participants interested.

“There was a ton of behind the scenes work going on, but there was also a feeling of genuine participation and that attendees were engaged and took the event seriously,” said Kiser, a presenter for the Environmental Caucus. “It seemed very few people left the event or dropped off of the Zoom.”

Hernandez said the event’s impact rippled beyond a single day, offering participating organizations a shared reference when contacting legislators about their specific community issues in the future.

“This created an opportunity for organizations to say, we met with you in June as part of this VDOA and we’d like to schedule a follow-up meeting,” Hernandez said. “That goes a lot farther than trying to cold-call a legislator for the first time.”



Results

More than 400 people from across California's tobacco control community participated in the VDOA, raising their voices against tobacco. Participants engaged in social media activities and posted throughout the day, using the hashtag #VoicesAgainstTobacco on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The event hashtag #VoicesAgainstTobacco used across all three platforms resulted in 160 mentions with a reach of 138,344.

Participants were encouraged to utilize the VDOA tools and resources to continue the conversation through letters to the editor templates, legislator Twitter handles, and social media content.

The event's strong participation numbers "showed the tobacco control community is really a force to be recognized," Batch said. "To pull that number of people together and speak in one unified voice was so important."

Participants noted that as the health and safety response to COVID-19 continues to limit in-person events, creating a virtual experience that builds on 2020 for future events may be necessary.

"The virtual I&E helped make it clear that this type of event is possible to conduct without being in-person and may be very useful for the future," Kiser said.

Sheree Johnson, Community Engagement Coordinator for Adventist Health Glendale Foundation's Tobacco Control Prevention Program, said the event provided valuable insight into how other organizations were approaching issues.

"Sometimes when you're doing this work, you just work, work, work, and you don't really have the opportunity to see how others are doing it," Johnson said. "When you hear about steps other organizations have taken to make things work it really gives you hope and you learn so much."

Johnson, who is relatively new to the tobacco community and participated in the Women's caucus, said she especially appreciated hearing from other groups during the afternoon session.

"It gave us tools and ideas that we could work with," Johnson said.

For event materials and social media messaging, go to: organizingtoendtobacco.org/ie-virtual-day-of-action-2020/

I&E Virtual Day of Action 2020



"We need for people to have long healthy lives. Sadly, once thier addicted, you know it's out of their control."

I just want to thank you again for your strong advocacy."

California Tobacco Endgame Center for Organizing and Engagement
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