

2026 | CAPITOL INFORMATION & EDUCATION DAYS



Truth and Health: Protecting Black Communities

Historically Disenfranchised Communities

- African Americans have faced harm due to unjust practices related to the sale of commercial tobacco. Starting from the forced labor during slavery where enslaved people were forced to grow and harvest tobacco that would later be sold.^{1,2}
- Since the 1950's the commercial tobacco industry has specifically targeted African Americans with predatory marketing strategies, focusing on mentholated tobacco products through ads, sponsorships, free samples, and promotions.^{1,3,4}
- In 2021, 18.7% of Black non-Hispanic adults reported using tobacco products. As of 2022, 83.7% of non-Hispanic Black Adults who smoked used menthol.^{5,6}
- Communities with a greater proportion of African Americans are more likely to have a denser presence of tobacco retailers and experience more advertising of mentholated tobacco products compared to other neighborhoods.⁷

Stress & Community Well-Being

- Research shows that culturally specific cessation features, including mobile apps designed with Black adult preferences, are critical to engagement and success, yet under-studied and under-used.⁸
- A 2020 study found that older African American smokers reported poorer physical health, more depression, and lower overall well-being than non-smokers.⁹
- Racism and discrimination are significant and ongoing sources of stress for many African American people.¹⁰
- In 2025, the majority of African American people said they had personally been discriminated against because of their race.¹¹
- Discrimination has been linked to tobacco product use and initiation as well as making it harder for individuals to quit smoking.^{12,13}



- Chronic stress from long-term discrimination elevates stress hormones, which may contribute to health problems like high blood pressure and diabetes.^{14,15}
- A 2021 study found that among African Americans with psychiatric illness, cigarette smoking was significantly associated with psychosocial stressors like friend strain, lifetime discrimination, and psychiatric medication appointments.¹⁶

Health Care & Discrimination

- Black adults are less likely to receive cessation counseling or medication from healthcare providers compared with white patients.¹⁷
- One in three Black adults say they have personally experienced racial discrimination when going to the doctor—leading many to avoid healthcare services because of it.¹⁸
- African Americans also experience discrimination and harm from systems intended to protect their health, including health care and medical science.^{19,20,21}
- Research shows that some African Americans may hesitate to seek care due to lack of trust in government or healthcare systems.^{22,23}

African American smokers need and deserve culturally tailored cessation services/support that address racism and the unique addictive qualities of mentholated tobacco products.

The national fight to ban the sale of mentholated tobacco products has been spearheaded by California's African American Tobacco Control Leadership Council.

www.SavingBlackLives.org

REFERENCES

1. Gardiner, Phillip S. The African Americanization of Menthol Cigarette Use in the United States. Alameda County Behavioral Health Care Services, Feb. 2004, https://www.acbhcs.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/African_Americanization.pdf
2. Fagan, Pebbles, and Linda A. Alexander. "The Legacy of Colonialism and Commercial Tobacco-Caused Social Inequities." *JNCI Monographs*, vol. 2025, no. 70, 11 Aug. 2025, pp. 187–200. Oxford Academic, <https://academic.oup.com/jncimono/article/2025/70/187/8229700>.
3. Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. Stopping Menthol, Saving Lives: Ending Big Tobacco's Predatory Marketing to Black Communities. Feb. 2021, https://assets.tobaccofreekids.org/content/what_we_do/industry_watch/menthol-report/2021_02_tfk-menthol-report.pdf.
4. Henriksen, Lisa, et al. "Targeted Advertising, Promotion, and Price for Menthol Cigarettes in California High School Neighborhoods." *Nicotine & Tobacco Research*, vol. 14, no. 1, Jan. 2012, pp. 116–121. U.S. National Library of Medicine, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3592564/>.
5. Agaku, Israel. "Tobacco Product Use among U.S. Adults, 2023–2024." *NEJM Evidence*, 10 Mar. 2026, <https://evidence.nejm.org/doi/pdf/10.1056/EVIDpha2500339>.
6. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Tobacco Product Use Among Adults — United States, 2022: 2022 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) Highlights. National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 2024, <https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/media/pdfs/2024/09/cdc-osh-ncis-data-report-508.pdf>. [umassmed.edu]
7. Sabado-Liwag, Melanie, Mayra Zamora, and Sherine El-Toukhy. "Current State of Unhealthy Living Characteristics in Black/African American and Latino Populations: Tobacco Use." *Progress in Cardiovascular Diseases*, vol. 71, 2022, pp. 27–36. PubMed Central, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10699915/>.
8. Clark, Sonia A., et al. "Features of Mobile Health Apps for Tobacco Cessation That Appeal to Black Adults Who Use Tobacco Products: Focus Group Study." *JMIR mHealth and uHealth*, vol. 14, 2026, e63340, <https://mhealth.jmir.org/2026/1/e63340>.
9. Bazargan, Mohsen, et al. "Smoking Status and Well-Being of Underserved African American Older Adults." *Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 10, no. 4, 2020, p. 78. MDPI, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7226211/>, doi:10.3390/bs10040078.
10. Slopen, Natalie, et al. "Psychosocial Stressors and Cigarette Smoking Among African American Adults in Midlife." *Nicotine & Tobacco Research*, vol. 14, no. 10, 2012, pp. 1161–1169. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ntr/nts011>. [scholars.duke.edu], [europepmc.org]
11. Pew Research Center. "Views of How Much Discrimination Racial and Ethnic Groups in the U.S. Face." Pew Research Center, 20 May 2025, <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2025/05/20/views-of-how-much-discrimination-racial-and-ethnic-groups-in-the-u-s-face/>.
12. Bennett, Gary G., Kathleen Yaus Wolin, Elwood L. Robinson, Sherrye Fowler, and Christopher L. Edwards. "Perceived Racial/Ethnic Harassment and Tobacco Use Among African American Young Adults." *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 95, no. 2, 2005, pp. 238–240. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2004.037812>.
13. Do, Dinh T., et al. "Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Smoking Prevalence and Smoking-Attributable Mortality among U.S. Adults, 2000–2019." *Preventing Chronic Disease*, vol. 17, 2020, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7360180/>.
14. Juster, Robert-Paul, Bruce S. McEwen, and Sonia J. Lupien. "Allostatic Load Biomarkers of Chronic Stress and Impact on Health and Cognition." *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2010, pp. 2–16. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neubiorev.2009.10.002>.
15. Guyll, Max, Karen A. Matthews, and Joyce T. Bromberger. "Discrimination and Unfair Treatment: Relationship to Cardiovascular Reactivity Among African American and European American Women." *Health Psychology*, vol. 20, no. 5, 2001, pp. 315–325. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0278-6133.20.5.315>.
16. Shpigel, Danielle M., et al. "Psychosocial and Psychiatric-Related Stress and Cigarette Smoking Among Black and Latinx Adults With Psychiatric Disorders." *Journal of Ethnicity in Substance Abuse*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2023, pp. 260–284. Taylor & Francis, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15332640.2021.1938328>. [scholars.mssm.edu], [naquitline.org]
17. "African American People Encounter Barriers to Quitting Successfully." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 15 May 2024, <https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco-health-equity/collection/african-american-quitting-tobacco.html>.
18. Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and National Public Radio. *Discrimination in America: Experiences and Views on Effects of Discrimination Across Major Population Groups in the United States*. 2017. PDF.
19. Prather, Cynthia, et al. "Racism, African American Women, and Their Sexual and Reproductive Health: A Review of Historical and Contemporary Evidence and Implications for Health Equity." *Health Equity*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2018, pp. 249–259. <https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/59617>. [stacks.cdc.gov]
20. Institute of Medicine. *Unequal Treatment: Confronting Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care*. The National Academies Press, 2013.
21. Institute of Medicine (US) Committee on the Consequences of Uninsurance. *Care Without Coverage: Too Little, Too Late*. National Academies Press, 2002.
22. Scharff, Darcell P., et al. "More than Tuskegee: Understanding Mistrust About Research Participation." *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved*, vol. 21, no. 3, 2010, pp. 879–897. <https://doi.org/10.1353/hpu.0.0323>.
23. Armstrong, Katrina, et al. "Racial/Ethnic Differences in Physician Distrust in the United States." *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 97, no. 7, 2007, pp. 1283–1289. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2005.080762>.

©2026

CA Tobacco Endgame Center for Organizing and Engagement
A Project of the American Heart Association

Funded by the California Department of Public Health, Grant # 24-10002
www.organizingtoendtobacco.org | organizingtoendtobacco@heart.org

