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Truth and Health: Protecting Rural Communities

*For generations, the pride and strength of our California rural communities lay in our strong values: **family, legacy, environment, resilience, independence, and community.** Today, these values are intentionally getting compromised by commercial tobacco and nicotine companies who continue to formulate addictive products and try to pass them off as less harmful. Truth be known, they're just creating more addicts out of our valued community members. **We need to face the truth** about these companies, products, and impacts on our rural families. The truth is the health crisis from tobacco and nicotine products exists only because tobacco and nicotine companies and their shareholders prioritize profits over health, while our communities bear all the death, disease, and costs.*

Commercial Tobacco & Nicotine Companies Constantly Introduce New Products

- While California has been a leader in protecting families from deadly tobacco and nicotine products, in 2025 alone, the FDA authorized more than 25 new nicotine pouch products (small synthetic fiber pouches containing nicotine designed to be placed between a person's gum and lip)^[1,2]

Impacts on Rural Communities

- California rural adult use of any commercial tobacco product is notably higher (14.5%) than the California general population (11.3%).^[5]
- Rural adult smokeless tobacco use is 5.4% vs. 2.1% among urban adults.^[6]
- California rural youth tobacco use (any product) is 9.8% vs. 6.1% urban.^[7]
- Rural youth nicotine pouch use 1.7% vs. 1.5% urban.^[7]
- Rural communities have a higher first-time cigarette and smokeless tobacco use rate than in urban areas and intergenerational tobacco use is a significant factor in prevention efforts.^[8]



The Commercial Tobacco Industry Targets Rural Californians

Rural youth and young adults are targeted using images of masculinity, blue collar, and outdoor themes in advertising,^[3] which were present for almost **50% of ads for smokeless tobacco products and over 33% of ads for cigarettes.**^[4]

- People living in rural areas have 18–20% higher lung cancer death rate than people living in urban areas.^[9]
- **There is a widening gap in life expectancy between rural and urban Americans—especially rural men.**^[10]

How can we help support those who want to quit?

Rural Communities Face Unique Challenges in Quitting Tobacco

- Individual rural residents may have greater difficulty accessing tobacco prevention services, due to local health care provider shortages, lower incomes, and elevated rates of uninsurance.^[11]
- Compared to the overall state population, rural residents are less likely to have smokefree policy protections (63.6% vs. 88.7%), which are shown to encourage quit attempts.^[12]
- Access to tobacco treatment is more limited in rural regions,^[13] where provider shortages make it harder to find primary care (14.7% of rural residents report difficulty accessing primary care, compared to 12.2% of all CA residents^[14]), further limiting opportunities for referrals to tobacco treatment.

63% of rural California tobacco users want to quit in the next 6 months.^[15]

Most tobacco users try to quit “cold turkey” without any help, and only 7–8% succeed.^[16] Evidence-based treatments greatly improve success rates, and combining behavioral treatments and pharmacotherapy can double or triple the chances of success.^[17]

- Generational tobacco use sends normalizing signals to children who then are more likely to view tobacco use as safe or acceptable^[18], even though we know tobacco use remains the “single most preventable cause of disease, disability, and death” in the United States.^[19]

Learn more at www.ca-rise.org.

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