

## Tobacco, COVID-19, and Racism

### **Studies show links between commercial tobacco use and COVID-19 illness.**

Smoking and secondhand smoke exposure suppress immune system function.<sup>i</sup>

People with smoking-related chronic health conditions like heart disease, diabetes, and lung disease are at a greater risk for getting seriously ill from COVID-19.<sup>ii</sup>

People who smoke have a harder time recovering from COVID-19.<sup>iii</sup>

### **Racism and other forms of discrimination have worsened inequities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Compared to white Wisconsin residents:**

Hispanic or Latinx residents have 1.7 times greater COVID-19 case rates.<sup>iv</sup>

Black residents have 2.2 times greater COVID-19 hospitalization rates.<sup>v</sup>

American Indian residents have 1.5 times greater COVID-19 death rates.<sup>vi</sup>

### **A person's social, economic, and physical environment shape their health more than any other factor.**<sup>vii</sup>

For example, people of color are more likely to work in essential jobs and live in high-density housing.<sup>viii</sup>

Coupled with living in neighborhoods with more tobacco retailers, which increases smoking rates, these factors compound the risk of COVID infection.<sup>ix</sup>

### **The tobacco industry has long perpetuated racism in their marketing practices.**

Communities of color have been targeted by the tobacco industry more than others, resulting in higher use rates, as seen to the right.<sup>x</sup>

“We don’t smoke that \*\*\*\*, we just sell it. We reserve the right to smoke for the young, the poor, the Black, and the stupid.” – Tobacco Executive quote from Tobacco Industry Documents<sup>xi</sup>

Although traditional tobacco has cultural significance from many Native American tribes, the tobacco industry’s use of Native images to sell commercial tobacco products reinforces harmful stereotypes. Examples include Natural American Spirit Cigarettes and Red Man Chew.<sup>xii</sup>

Tobacco products are also more likely to be placed near candy and within three feet of the floor at retailers in Black and Latinx neighborhoods than in white neighborhoods in Milwaukee.<sup>xiii</sup> This makes them more likely to catch the attention of youth.

Inequitable enforcement of tobacco prevention and control policies also contributes to racial disparities by criminalizing people of color for the purchase, possession, sale, and distribution of tobacco products.<sup>xiv</sup>

### **Learn more about how you can join the movement to declare racism a public health crisis in Wisconsin.**

## Tobacco, COVID-19, and Racism

Visit the UW Population Health Institute's Racism Declaration Sign-On page: <https://bit.ly/3ot10qf>

**For help quitting commercial tobacco, or staying tobacco-free, call 1 800 QUIT-NOW or visit [www.WiQuitLine.org](http://www.WiQuitLine.org).**

**The American Indian Quit Line is 1-88-7AI QUIT** provides culturally tailored and specific interventions that integrate the unique social context of American Indian culture.

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- <sup>i</sup> Children and Secondhand Smoke Exposure. (n.d.). Retrieved from [https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data\\_statistics/sgr/2006/pdfs/childrens-excerpt.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/sgr/2006/pdfs/childrens-excerpt.pdf)
- <sup>ii</sup> Certain Medical Conditions and Risk for Severe COVID-19 Illness. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html>
- <sup>iii</sup> Certain Medical Conditions and Risk for Severe COVID-19 Illness. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html>
- <sup>iv</sup> COVID-19: Racial and Ethnic Disparities. (2020, November 18). Retrieved from <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/disparities.htm>
- <sup>v</sup> COVID-19: Racial and Ethnic Disparities. (2020, November 18). Retrieved from <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/disparities.htm>
- <sup>vi</sup> COVID-19: Racial and Ethnic Disparities. (2020, November 18). Retrieved from <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/disparities.htm>
- <sup>vii</sup> COVID-19: Racial and Ethnic Disparities. (2020, November 18). Retrieved from <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/disparities.htm>
- <sup>viii</sup> COVID-19: Racial and Ethnic Disparities. (2020, November 18). Retrieved from <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/disparities.htm>
- <sup>ix</sup> COVID-19: Racial and Ethnic Disparities. (2020, November 18). Retrieved from <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/disparities.htm>
- <sup>x</sup> Tobacco Prevention and Control Program: General Information and Data. (2020, March 09). Retrieved from <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/tobacco/data.htm>
- <sup>xi</sup> Certain Medical Conditions and Risk for Severe COVID-19 Illness. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html>
- <sup>xii</sup> Tobacco use in the American Indian/Alaska Native community. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://truthinitiative.org/research-resources/targeted-communities/tobacco-use-american-indianalaska-native-community>
- <sup>xiii</sup> COVID-19: Racial and Ethnic Disparities. (2020, November 18). Retrieved from <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/disparities.htm>
- <sup>xiv</sup> Consortium of Public Health Organizations Release Statement on Addressing Systemic Racism in Commercial Tobacco Control Enforcement. (2020, October 15). Retrieved from <https://countertobacco.org/30-public-health-organizations-release-statement-on-addressing-systemic-racism-in-commercial-tobacco-control-enforcement/>