

ISSUE LOOK WISCONSIN TOBACCO PREVENTION & CONTROL MOVEMENT

MINIMUM LEGAL AGE TO PURCHASE TOBACCO (MLA)

THE LANDSCAPE

IN WISCONSIN

- Currently, you must be 18 years of age or older to purchase tobacco products in Wisconsin.
- In addition, the state law contains preemption language that prohibits local governments from enacting a different sales age for tobacco. This language would need to be altered or removed in order for localities to change the sales age.

IN THE UNITED STATES

Federal legislation to raise the MLA to 21 was introduced in September 2015.¹

AGE 18: Like Wisconsin, most states currently set the MLA at 18 years.

AGE 19: Four states set it at 19 years.

AGE 21: In 2016, Hawaii will be the first state to enforce a tobacco sales of 21.

At least 90 localities in eight states have also raised the minimum legal sale age for tobacco products to 21.²

WHY RAISE THE MLA TO 21?³

LIMITS YOUTH ACCESS TO TOBACCO FROM SOCIAL CIRCLES

- A higher MLA limits social channels for youth to get enough cigarettes to develop a regular smoking habit.
- Youth frequently rely on getting cigarettes from the 18-20 year olds in their social circles. Raising the MLA to 21 as opposed to 19 reduces access to legal buyers in their daily routine.

ALLOWS FOR HEALTHY TEEN BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

- The parts of the brain most responsible for decision-making and impulse control continue developing in the 20's. Adolescents are uniquely vulnerable to nicotine exposure since it can chemically alter a teen's developing brain.

REDUCES TOBACCO USE RATES & CONSEQUENCES OF USE

According to a March 2015 Institute of Medicine report, a nationwide 21 MLA would result in:

- 25% drop in youth smoking initiation
- 12% drop in overall smoking rates
- 16% drop in SIDS cases due to reduced tobacco exposure in mothers and infants

SUPPORT

Most adults favor making 21 the minimum age of sale for tobacco products.⁴

3 out of 4

U.S. adults favor making 21 the minimum age of sale for tobacco products.

This includes 7 out of 10 cigarette smokers.

A CASE STUDY

In 2005, Needham, Massachusetts, was the first town in the U.S. to raise their legal sales age for tobacco to 21.⁵

Since other Boston suburbs tightly surround Needham, many thought it wouldn't make a difference. But there was a surprise — by 2010, the youth smoking rate in Needham had dropped by more than half, while the surrounding suburbs rates fell only slightly. Since then, other towns in Massachusetts have followed suit and passed tobacco 21 laws.

CITATIONS

1. H.R.3656 — 114th Congress (2015-2016). Press Release: <http://www.schatz.senate.gov/press-releases/senators-schatz-durbin-brown-colleagues-introduce-legislation-to-raise-smoking-age-to-21>
2. A current listing can be found at <http://tobacco21.org/state-by-state/>
3. IOM (Institute of Medicine). 2015. *Public health implications of raising the minimum age of legal access to tobacco products*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.
4. King, Brian A. et al. Attitudes toward raising the minimum age of sale for tobacco among U.S. adults. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* , Volume 49 , Issue 4 , 583 - 588.
5. Kessel Schneider et al. Community reductions in youth smoking after raising the minimum tobacco sales age to 21. *Tob Control*. June 2015.

GENERAL RESOURCES

COUNTER TOBACCO

Raising the Legal Minimum Sale Age to 21

<http://countertobacco.org/raising-minimum-legal-sale-age-21>

TOBACCO 21

<http://tobacco21.org/>

PUBLIC HEALTH IMPLICATIONS OF RAISING THE MINIMUM AGE OF LEGAL ACCESS TO TOBACCO PRODUCTS

Institute of Medicine

<http://www.iom.edu/TobaccoMinimumAge>