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Cigarette Smoking Has Declined Among 18-24 Year Olds But Disparities Among Populations Are Cause for Concern

Statement of Robin Koval, CEO & President, Truth Initiative on the CDC's Report on Current Cigarette Smoking Among Adults

It is terrific news that the results of the National Health Interview Survey, released today by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), show smoking is on the decline among 18- to 24-year olds in the U.S., with a more than 45 percent drop between 2005 and 2015 and a significant year on year decline of 3.7 percentage points; a dramatic 22 percent decline in a single year. These highly encouraging results in part reflect the unprecedented power of having three complementary national public education programs including Truth Initiative's **truth**, CDC's Tips and FDA's Real Cost in the market at the same time.

However, the data also quite starkly highlight the growing disparity in our population in terms of who are the tobacco industry's best customers. Smoking is increasingly a function of who you are, where you live, your income and your sexual preference. The report underscores that smoking disproportionately affects individuals who live below poverty level, LGBT persons, the uninsured or Medicaid insured, those suffering from a disability or mental illness, and individuals living in areas with weak clean air laws and low taxes – predominantly the Midwest and South. For example, South Carolina has no smoking restrictions and is 45th in the country for its cigarettes tax of 57 cents per pack.

Many of the differences in smoking rates can be attributed to specific targeting by the tobacco industry. For instance, tobacco companies target the LGBT community by sponsoring events, bar promotions, and advertisements. Researchers have also found a higher density of tobacco retailers in low-income neighborhoods.

Public education campaigns targeted to youth and young adults, like **truth**, are doing their part. But for public education to fulfill its potential to prevent teen tobacco use, we need lawmakers at all levels to act on clean air indoor policies, excise taxes and price minimums, flavored tobacco bans and proposals to raise the minimum age of sale of tobacco products to 21.

About Truth Initiative

Truth Initiative is a national public health organization that is inspiring tobacco-free lives and building a culture where all youth and young adults reject tobacco. The truth about tobacco and the tobacco industry are at the heart of our proven-effective and nationally recognized **truth**[®] public education campaign, our rigorous and scientific research and policy studies, and our innovative community and youth engagement programs supporting populations at high risk of using tobacco. The Washington, D.C.-based organization, formerly known as Legacy, was established and funded through the 1998 Master Settlement Agreement between attorneys general from 46 states, five U.S. territories and the tobacco industry. To learn more about our work speaking, seeking and spreading the truth about tobacco, visit truthinitiative.org.