

National Public and Minority Health Organizations Launch *Stop the Influence*, a Pledge Campaign to Reject Big Tobacco and Vape Money

WASHINGTON, D.C. (June 10, 2021) – The African American Tobacco Control Leadership Council, Black Women’s Health Imperative, Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids and Truth Initiative®, today announced **Stop the Influence: Reject Big Tobacco and Vape Money**, a call to organizations to sign a pledge to reject funding from or any form or partnership with companies that sell any tobacco or vaping products such as combustible cigarettes, e-cigarettes, or heated tobacco as well as nicotine lozenges, pipes, cigars, cigarillos and hookah. To date, 32 organizations have signed the pledge. Interested organizations can learn more and sign on at truthinitiative.org/stop-the-influence.

The tobacco industry has long used strategic contributions and alliances with organizations and public leaders under the guise of philanthropy and public service to help protect business interests and ward off effective policies that reduce tobacco use and save lives in order to boost its image among existing and prospective customers. These tactics continue to intensify as the tobacco companies aggressively market flashy new electronic and flavored products to grow their market share especially among youth. Not surprisingly, many of those hit hardest by COVID-19 and systemic racism have long been targeted by the tobacco industry via predatory marketing tactics, including Black, Indigenous, People of Color and LGBTQ+ communities.

Youth-serving, social and racial justice, environmental and public health advocacy organizations; college and university leaders; faith groups; and cultural institutions are being asked to [sign a pledge](#) and take a stance rejecting the tobacco-vape industry’s influence by not accepting donations and refusing any partnerships. The goal is for organizations to join forces and expose tobacco industry donations for what they are: blatant public relations stunts intended to protect the industry’s profits and thwart real solutions that save lives.

In addition, Truth Initiative through its proven-effective national [truth](#)® youth smoking and vaping prevention and public education campaign is also calling on young people to influence change with an effort called “[truth over money](#).” Young people can get involved by signing the pledge and learning the facts to help realize a better future free from the environmentally destructive toxins resulting from tobacco and vaping. With 398 signatures to date, it is clear that young people will not stand for being targeted and exploited by the tobacco industry as it continues to fuel the youth e-cigarette epidemic with nearly one in five high school students vaping in 2020.

“The tobacco industry has a long history of shamelessly protecting profits at the expense of people’s lives and it is intensifying,” said Robin Koval, CEO and president, Truth Initiative. “Central to the tobacco-vape industry’s playbook is targeting groups – especially young people, Black Americans and vulnerable populations – to recruit as the next generation of individuals addicted to nicotine and customers for life. It will take everyone working together to reject the industry’s hollow PR stunts and philanthropic contributions that borrow the well-earned credibility of reputable organizations to improve the industry’s poor image. We’re calling on organizations and youth alike to join the fight against the industry’s relentless “charm offensive” and to use our collective voice to say no to tobacco and vape dollars.

“The tobacco industry has had a devastating impact on the Black community,” said Dr. Phil Gardiner, co-chair, African American Tobacco Control Leadership Council. “Whether through the predatory marketing of menthol cigarettes and little cigars in our community, to buying the voices of some African American groups, the tobacco industry has been and is nothing but bad news for our community. The African

American Tobacco Control Leadership Council strongly encourages all groups not to take money from the tobacco industry."

"This is a social justice issue. For decades, the tobacco industry has carefully executed a cross-sector marketing campaign to infiltrate the Black community with menthol cigarettes with no oversight. This campaign's success is now being used in the tobacco and vaping industry, where we have seen an increase in marketing of their products to Black youth, especially over the last year, during COVID-19," says Linda Goler Blount, BWHI president and CEO. "Given that smoking and vaping increase the risk of COVID-19 complications and residual effects, it is more critical than ever that we provide the tools and awareness needed in Black communities to champion the fight against the tobacco industry from further ravaging our communities," says Blount.

"For far too long the tobacco industry has used its deep pockets to fund organizations to buy goodwill and lend itself a false veneer of legitimacy. That is why it is so important that organizations pledge to 'Stop the Influence' and reject any funding or partnership opportunities with tobacco or vaping companies," said Matthew L. Myers, the President of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. "At the end of the day, tobacco companies are still responsible for the deaths of more than 480,000 Americans every year."

The stakes are high – for all of us

- Tobacco use is still the leading cause of preventable death in the nation. Every year, approximately 480,000 die prematurely from tobacco-related diseases including cancers, heart disease, lung disease, and stroke.
- The youth vaping epidemic continues, with about one in five high school students using e-cigarettes in 2020. What's more, a Truth Initiative study shows that young people who have ever used e-cigarettes had seven times higher odds of becoming smokers one year later compared with those who had never vaped.¹
- Unless smoking rates decline, 5.6 million kids under 18 today will ultimately die from smoking.
- Smoking-related illnesses cost the United States more than \$226 billion in health care expenses each year.

While tobacco takes an enormous toll on users and their loved ones, the damage extends still further.

- Cigarettes are the most littered item on earth. Each year, an estimated 766,571 metric tons of cigarette butts make their way into the environment and up to 1,500 pounds of waste tobacco products litter the world.² The rise of single-use and disposable e-cigarettes has compounded this environmental impact.
- In blatant displays of greenwashing, tobacco companies sponsor clean-ups, recycling programs, and other public displays of eco-activism while barely making a dent in an environmental problem they created in the first place.

Truth Initiative is **hosting a virtual discussion on Thursday, June 10, 2021 at 12:30 pm - 1:15 pm ET** on the tobacco industry's efforts to rebrand itself as a part of the public health solution while putting a new generation at risk for nicotine addiction. To watch the event, visit <https://youtu.be/Eiw3HK3wD5s>

¹ Elizabeth C. Hair, Alexis A. Barton, Siobhan N. Perks, Jennifer Kreslake, Haijun Xiao, Lindsay Pitzer, Adam M. Leventhal, Donna M. Vallone, *Association between e-cigarette use and future combustible cigarette use: Evidence from a prospective cohort of youth and young adults*, 2017–2019, *Addictive Behaviors*, Volume 112, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2020.106593>.

² Keep America Beautiful, *National Visible Litter Survey and Litter Cost Study*, 2009, http://www.kab.org/site/DocServer/Final_KAB_Report_9-18-09.pdf?docID=4561

To learn more about tobacco industry influence, read the Truth Initiative report, [Spinning a New Tobacco Industry](#).

About Truth Initiative®

Truth Initiative is a national public health organization that is inspiring lives free from smoking, vaping and nicotine and building a culture where all young people reject tobacco. In 2020, we celebrated 20 years of saving lives and preventing millions of youth from smoking. Our impact has helped drive the teen smoking rate down from 23% in 2000 to 4.2% in 2020. The truth about tobacco and the tobacco industry are at the heart of our proven-effective and nationally recognized **truth**® public education campaign. **truth** has also recently taken on the youth epidemics of vaping and opioids. Our rigorous scientific research and policy studies, community and youth engagement programs supporting populations at high risk of using tobacco and innovation in tobacco dependence treatment, are also helping to end one of the most critical public health battles of our time. Based in Washington D.C., our organization, formerly known as the American Legacy Foundation, 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, visit truthinitiative.org.

About African-American Tobacco Control Leadership Council

Formed in 2008, the African American Tobacco Control Leadership Council (AATCLC) partners with community stakeholders, elected officials and public health agencies to inform the national direction of tobacco control policy, practices and priorities, as they affect the lives of Black-American and African immigrant populations.

About Black Women's Health Imperative

The Black Women's Health Imperative (BWHI) is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing health equity and social justice for Black women across the lifespan through policy, advocacy, education, research, and leadership development. The organization identifies the most pressing health issues that affect the nation's 22 million Black women and girls and invests in the best strategies and organizations that accomplish its goals. For more information, please visit bwhi.org.

About The Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids

The Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids is the leading advocacy organization working to reduce tobacco use and its deadly consequences in the United States and around the world. Through strategic communications and policy advocacy campaigns, Tobacco-Free Kids works to change public attitudes about tobacco and promote proven policies that are most effective at reducing tobacco use and save the most lives.