
Truth Initiative Kicks Off Celebration Bowl Partnership Spotlighting Tobacco's Impact on Black Communities and Connects Fans with Quit Support

Activation builds on Truth Initiative's long-standing efforts to advance health equity and expand access to proven cessation resources

WASHINGTON, D.C. (December 11, 2025) – [Truth Initiative](#), the nation's largest nonprofit public health organization committed to ending nicotine addiction, is joining the 2025 Celebration Bowl — the annual championship game showcasing the best of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) football, hosted in Atlanta, Georgia, and airing on Saturday, December 13 at 12:00 p.m. ET on ABC. The organization's presence will shine a light on the disproportionate impact of tobacco on Black health and build on the work of its [Culture + Cessation Collective](#) by bringing culturally relevant quitting support directly to HBCU students, alumni, and fans through [EX Program](#) — the free, digital quit program from Truth Initiative.

For decades, the tobacco industry strategically targeted Black communities through predatory marketing and the appropriation of Black culture in advertising and event sponsorships. Today, the consequences are devastating. Black Americans have one of the highest prevalence of smoking of all racial and ethnic groups — as of 2021, 11.7% of Black American adults are current smokers, compared to 11.5% of American adults overall — and they experience higher death rates from tobacco-related causes, with roughly 45,000 Black Americans dying each year from smoking-related illness. Additionally, according to the most recent available data, more than 80% of Black smokers use menthol cigarettes, compared to 43% of adult smokers overall, which are easier to start and harder to quit.

Throughout the event, Truth Initiative and community partners will unite around culture and football to reclaim health as a form of liberation and equip Black individuals with the tools needed to quit. As part of this effort, EX Program, developed by Truth Initiative in collaboration with Mayo Clinic, will be featured prominently across in-stadium activations, digital advertising, the Celebration Bowl's social media channels, and the Battle of the Bands. The free, evidence-based quit program offers personalized plans, interactive text messages, and a supportive online community.

“As we gather to celebrate HBCU excellence, it's important to recognize the long history of exploitation by the tobacco industry that has harmed Black health for generations — and to make sure our communities have access to real, trusted



support,” said Kendric Dartis, Vice President, Outreach and Engagement at Truth Initiative. “This partnership with the Celebration Bowl allows us to meet people where they are, honor the strength of HBCU culture, and ensure that quitting support is accessible, relevant, and rooted in community.”

Truth Initiative’s presence at the Celebration Bowl serves as a complement to the efforts of its [Breath of Freedom](#) coalition. The Breath of Freedom coalition — part of Truth Initiative’s [Culture + Cessation Collective](#) — is a community-led network of Black health-equity organizations reclaiming health as a form of liberation. Through education, peer support and culturally resonant tools, the coalition tackles the impact of predatory menthol marketing and systemic tobacco-industry targeting in Black communities, and equips individuals with the knowledge and resources they need to quit for good.

According to the most recently available [data](#), more than 12% of adults in Georgia currently smoke cigarettes and nearly 8% of adults use e-cigarettes. To deepen its impact on the ground at the Celebration, Truth Initiative is activating a network of community-based partners whose missions align with advancing Black health, expanding access to quitting support, and empowering the next generation. Together, these collaborations bring accessible, community-driven solutions directly to fans.

- **BLKHLTH:** Truth Initiative is partnering with [BLKHLTH](#), an Atlanta-based nonprofit focused on advancing health equity in Black communities, to provide tickets to members of their organization and offer community engagement that aligns with their broader role as a member of the Breath of Freedom coalition.

“Ending nicotine addiction among Black Americans requires collective action, authentic communication from trusted messengers, and meeting our communities where they are,” said Khadijah Ameen, PhD, MPH, Co-Founder and Director of Policy & Research at BLKHLTH. “BLKHLTH is proud to be part of the Breath of Freedom coalition, and we look forward to bringing culturally responsive tobacco-cessation resources to the Celebration Bowl HBCU National Championship.”

- **EVERFI:** Truth Initiative is partnering with EVERFI, the leader in social impact education, to implement a ticket incentive for educators and students in the Metro Atlanta area who are completing the [Vaping: Know the truth](#) curriculum. *Vaping: Know the truth*, created by Truth Initiative and made available to educators by EVERFI, is a free digital curriculum that



teaches students about the dangers of e-cigarettes use and connects those already vaping with resources to quit. The curriculum is currently being used by more than 9,000 students across the state of Georgia and more than 1.5 million students nationwide.

“Using Vaping: Know the truth in my health classes helped students understand the dangers of e-cigarette use, nicotine addiction, and where to get support if they’re already vaping,” said Jamal Basit, Ed.S, Health and PE Department Chair and Head Boys Basketball Coach at Lakeside High School in Atlanta. “Students reference the material, show stronger understanding, and make better decisions with practical tools they can use right away. I’m grateful to attend this year’s Celebration Bowl and continue championing the health of future generations.”

- **Big Brothers Big Sisters of Metro Atlanta:** Truth Initiative alongside [Big Brothers Big Sisters of Metro Atlanta](#) will provide tickets to Bigs and Littles to attend both the Battle of the Bands and the Celebration Bowl, enabling participation in the Celebration Bowl weekend and strengthen community connection.

“I am excited to partner with Truth Initiative to provide our students with exposure to opportunities like the Battle of the Bands,” said Kwame Johnson Sr., President & CEO of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Metro Atlanta. “Together, we are ensuring young people gain access to information that helps them make informed decisions and reach their full potential.”

- **HBCU Alum:** Truth Initiative will team up with [HBCU Alum](#), an influential social media platform with more than 500K followers founded by Terrence G. Caldwell that celebrates the Black college experience. HBCU Alum will capture dynamic, on-the-ground content spotlighting HBCU pride, culture, and Black health at the Celebration Bowl and the Battle of the Bands that will be featured across its Instagram and Facebook channels.

“HBCU Alum is thrilled to partner with Truth Initiative during Celebration Bowl weekend to empower our community with information that truly matter,” said Terrence G. Caldwell. HBCU Alum. “This collaboration allows us to engage HBCU graduates and supporters in meaningful conversations, not just about school pride and culture, but also about healthier lifestyles and actionable ways to eliminate tobacco and nicotine addiction. Together, we’re committed to creating a future where our HBCU family thrives, fully and unapologetically.”



The Celebration Bowl marks a moment to honor Black culture, empower Black communities, and reclaim Black health. Anyone ready to start their quit journey can join for free at **EXProgram.com** or by texting **KICKNIC to 88709** for confidential, evidence-based support.

About Truth Initiative

Truth Initiative® is a national nonprofit public health organization committed to a future free from lifelong addiction, fostering healthier lives and a more resilient nation. Our mission is to prevent youth and young adult nicotine addiction and empower quitting for all. Through our evidence-based, market-leading cessation intervention, [EX® Program](#), and national public education campaigns, we lead the fight against youth and young adult tobacco use. Learn more at truthinitiative.org.

About EX Program

EX® Program is a proven-effective tobacco cessation program, developed by Truth Initiative® with Mayo Clinic, that brings together the best evidence-based quitting approaches, interactive digital quitting programs, and the most established online quit community. EX Program has helped millions of youth and adults develop the skills and confidence to successfully quit. Truth Initiative research has shown that EX Program text messages can increase a user's odds of quitting by up to 40%. To learn more, visit exprogram.com.

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