
Truth Initiative, NAACP Unite to Expand Access to Proven Quit Resources and End Targeted Tobacco Harm

WASHINGTON, D.C. (February 23, 2026) – Truth Initiative® and the NAACP today announced a partnership to confront the disproportionate toll of tobacco and nicotine addiction on Black communities and other historically marginalized groups, while supporting individuals in quitting for good. The collaboration combines the NAACP’s legacy of advancing racial and health equity with Truth Initiative’s expertise as the nation’s largest nonprofit public health organization dedicated to ending nicotine addiction, including through [EX Program](#) — a free, digital quit resource developed with Mayo Clinic. This work builds on Truth Initiative’s [Breath of Freedom](#) coalition to deliver culturally relevant quit-smoking and quit-vaping programs, expand access to free resources, and advocate for policies that protect youth and communities of color.

“For decades, the tobacco industry has strategically exploited Black communities through predatory marketing and the appropriation of Black culture, making it essential to ensure access to effective, accessible resources to quit and reclaim health,” said Dr. Kendric Dartis, Vice President of Outreach and Engagement at Truth Initiative. “By joining forces with the NAACP, we’re expanding access to evidence-based, culturally resonant cessation support that meets people where they are and advances equity in the fight against nicotine addiction.”

Black Americans experience a disproportionate burden of tobacco-related illness and death and have the third highest in prevalence of smoking after American Indians/Alaska Natives and non-Hispanic white people. 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 dying each year from smoking-related illness. Additionally, according to the most recent available data, compared to 43% of adult smokers overall, more than 80% of Black smokers use menthol cigarettes, which are easier to start and harder to quit.

“Big Tobacco has targeted Black communities with menthol cigarettes and flavored tobacco products for generations, resulting in devastating health inequities,” said Dr. Chris T. Pernell, Director of the NAACP Center of Health Equity. “This partnership represents a powerful step toward dismantling systemic inequities and reframing quitting as both an act of healing and liberation for our communities.”



This collaboration advances the mission of [Breath of Freedom](#), a coalition within the [Culture + Cessation Collective](#)—a national effort driven by Truth Initiative that unites community-based leaders to address nicotine addiction in ways that meet the unique needs of LGBTQ+, Black, and Hispanic/Latino communities. Breath of Freedom responds to the historical exploitation of Black communities by the tobacco industry, particularly through menthol marketing. By providing tools, education, and support, Breath of Freedom and its community leaders are redefining the narrative around tobacco use in Black communities.

Through this partnership, Truth Initiative and NAACP will:

- Host free and culturally relevant community discussions and educational cessation workshops to highlight the consequences of smoking and vaping as part of the [Culture + Cessation Collective](#), an initiative rooted in cultural connection and community-driven support.
- Advance the mission of the [Breath of Freedom coalition](#), reframing nicotine cessation as an act of liberation and resistance to the tobacco industry's exploitation.
- Advocate for stronger protections against menthol and flavored tobacco products that target youth and communities of color.
- Mobilize local, regional, and national outreach strategies to strengthen grassroots advocacy, elevate community voices, and push for stronger protections against menthol and flavored tobacco products that target youth and communities of color.
- Expand access to [EX Program](#) created by Truth Initiative with Mayo Clinic, a free and proven resource developed with Mayo Clinic that can increase a tobacco user's odds of quitting by up to 40%. Since January 2025, over 17,000 Black Americans have enrolled in EX Program, and over 4 million Black Americans have viewed the [Outsmart Nicotine](#) ad campaign which reinforces that quitting nicotine is achievable with the right support.

"No one should have to bear the burden of quitting alone. This partnership will break down stigma and create a community for those looking to take the first step towards quitting," Dartis added.

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 NAACP

The NAACP advocates, agitates, and litigates for the civil rights due to Black America. Our legacy is built on the foundation of grassroots activism by the biggest civil rights pioneers of the 20th century and is sustained by 21st century activists. From classrooms and courtrooms to city halls and Congress, our network of members across the country works to secure the social and political power that will end race-based discrimination. That work is rooted in racial equity, civic engagement, and supportive policies and institutions for all marginalized people. We are committed to a world without racism where Black people enjoy equitable opportunities in thriving communities.

NOTE: The Legal Defense Fund – also referred to as the NAACP-LDF - was founded in 1940 as a part of the NAACP, but now operates as a completely separate entity.

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