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Tobacco Imagery Dominates Oscar®-Nominated Films, Raising Public Health Concerns Ahead of Hollywood's Biggest Night

New Truth Initiative survey also indicates 85% of young people report seeing tobacco use in content they watch; 43% of those planning to quit say seeing imagery makes it harder

WASHINGTON, D.C. (March 12, 2026)—As the entertainment industry prepares to spotlight its most celebrated movies, a new Truth Initiative analysis raises concern: Eight of the 10 films nominated for the Best Picture Academy Award® this year feature tobacco imagery. The continued depiction of cigarettes and other nicotine products in popular, award-nominated films normalizes an addictive behavior for impressionable viewers that extends well beyond awards season.

While national survey data indicate tobacco use among young people is at its lowest level in a decade, past 30-day use of any nicotine product among 12th graders increased from 17% to 21.8% between 2024 and 2025. Research shows that exposure to tobacco imagery can triple a young person's likelihood of starting to vape. Tobacco imagery in movies can also make it harder for those already addicted to nicotine to quit successfully.

"We've made tremendous progress in reducing youth tobacco use, but on-screen imagery risks reversing that progress," said Dr. Jessica Rath, Senior Vice President of Truth Initiative Schroeder Institute. "We need the entertainment industry to be part of the solution—not a source of relapse or recruitment for the next generation of nicotine users."

Tobacco Imagery Remains an Ongoing Problem

The presence of tobacco imagery in this year's Academy Award® nominated films reflects an ongoing problem. Recent research from NORC at the University of Chicago in collaboration with Truth Initiative revealed that more than half of 2024's top films featured on-screen tobacco use—a 10-percentage point increase from the previous year.

New Truth Initiative survey data further underscore this trend. The survey of young people, ages 15-24 found that 85% of respondents report seeing tobacco use frequently in the content they watch, highlighting the scale of exposure.

These analyses also build on Truth Initiative's longstanding While You Were Streaming report series, which has led efforts to raise awareness and drive action

around the impact of tobacco depictions on screens—including recent findings tied to the Emmy® Awards that underscore how tobacco's presence in prestige entertainment extends further than any single awards season or format.

Tobacco Imagery Can Influence Youth Initiation and Undermine Quitting

Beyond the impact on youth initiation, tobacco imagery can also make it harder for those already addicted to nicotine to successfully quit. Research shows that exposure to smoking or vaping on screen can trigger cravings and increase the likelihood of relapse among people trying to quit. New Truth Initiative survey data also indicate that 43% of young people, ages 15-24, who have intentions to quit nicotine reported that seeing tobacco in the shows and content that they watch makes it harder to quit.

"For people fighting to quit nicotine, seeing tobacco use on screen can feel like a punch in the gut, bringing cravings rushing back and making an already difficult journey even harder, especially when the behavior is modeled by admired actors," said Dr. Jessica Rath, Senior Vice President, Schroeder Institute at Truth Initiative.

Members of the EX Program community—the digital quit program from Truth Initiative—have also reported that seeing tobacco use on screen can trigger nicotine cravings and undermine quit attempts.

Holding the Entertainment Industry Accountable

Truth Initiative urges studios, streaming services, and policymakers to adopt stronger policies to reduce tobacco depictions in entertainment and provide quit resources for viewers. Entertainment companies should ensure that content featuring tobacco imagery includes pre-roll or end-card messages with tested messaging and quit support—such as EX Program—to provide viewers with guidance and help.

"Young audiences should see stories on their screens that motivate and empower them, not portrayals that risk drawing them into lifelong nicotine addiction," said Dr. Rath.

About Truth Initiative

Truth Initiative® is a national nonprofit public health organization committed to a future free from lifelong nicotine 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 on their journey to quit nicotine. Truth Initiative research has shown that EX Program can increase a user's odds of quitting by up to 40%. To learn more, visit exprogram.com.

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