truth initiative
freedom from nicotine addiction

Schroeder Institute®
FOR TOBACCO RESEARCH AND POLICY STUDIES

E-cigarettes and Youth Affordability

E-cigarettes, the most commonly used nicotine product among young people in the United States, have increased in volume capacity and nicotine strength over time. They have also dropped dramatically in price, becoming more affordable and accessible to young people.

Affordable products containing high concentrations of nicotine put young people at risk of nicotine addiction. While some researchers have argued that increasing e-cigarette prices could stop adults from using them as an alternative to combustible cigarettes, new research shows that e-cigarettes are already overwhelmingly affordable — costing just 1% of annual income for young adults — such that even doubling the price would not pose a financial burden. Alternatively, cost-conscious teens (ages 16-19) don't have the budget to accommodate price increases and would be severely constrained.

Truth Initiative recommends increased taxes on e-cigarettes, price minimums on nicotine products, and the removal of flavored and illegal products, to prevent youth uptake and addiction.

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WHILE COST OF LIVING RISES, NICOTINE GETS CHEAPER

Despite rising taxes and cost of living, nicotine has become more affordable for young people. According to a Truth Initiative study published in *Tobacco Control*, the average price of 1 mL of e-liquid decreased by 16.2% between 2015 and 2021, with teens using less of their annual income to buy the same amount of nicotine over time.

E-cigarette prices began to drop in 2019, when teens needed to use 33% of their annual income to buy five large-capacity disposable e-cigarettes containing 20mL of nicotine e-liquid. In 2021, they only needed 23% of their income to purchase the same products.

Because younger teens are more price-sensitive, affordability varies by age. **Between 2019 and 2021, e-cigarettes became:**

14%
more affordable for teens aged **16-17**

9.7%
more affordable for teens aged **18-19**

12%
more affordable for young adults aged **20-24**

13.4%
more affordable for older adults aged **25-34**

Stronger and cheaper e-cigarettes, most of which are disposable, flavored, and sold illegally without Food and Drug Administration authorization, make nicotine highly accessible and appealing for young people. Mechanisms to raise prices, as well as policies that remove flavored and illegal products from the market, can protect young people from nicotine addiction.

TAXES AS A TOOL FOR PUBLIC HEALTH

Truth Initiative supports levying the highest possible taxes on cigarettes and all other combustible tobacco products. Additionally, all tobacco products, including e-cigarettes, should be taxed at rates that discourage youth use, making them less affordable to teens while remaining accessible to adults.

Increasing the price of e-cigarettes could be especially helpful in helping heavy users quit, as higher prices have a larger impact on frequent users who dedicate more of their income to buying e-cigarettes.

E-cigarettes are generally less affordable in states such as Massachusetts that apply an ad-valorem (percentage of price) tax. States where ad-valorem taxes have been implemented can serve as an example for other states who wish to institute taxation mechanisms that reduce youth e-cigarette use.

Source: Diaz MC, Braganza K, Minter T, *et al.* Changes in price, income and e-cigarette affordability for young people in the USA from 2015 to 2021. *Tobacco Control* 2026;**35**:71-78.

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