Burden of Tobacco Use in Maine: Low-Income Populations

MPHA
Maine Public Health Association

Smoking Prevalence is Higher in Low-Income Populations

As income increases, smoking prevalence decreases*[1]:

- Earning less than $35,000: 26.0%
- Earning $35,000–$74,999: 20.5%
- Earning $75,000–$99,999: 18.4%
- Earning $100,000+: 13.5%

**Percentage of U.S. adults 18 years or older reporting using a tobacco product "every day" or "some days"*

Health Effects

Income, education, and geographic disparities increase the risk for lung cancer:

- Lower income smokers have higher lung cancer risk than those with higher income.[2]
- People with less than a high school education have higher lung cancer incidence than those with a college education.[3,4]
- People with family incomes of less than $12,500 had lung cancer incidence rates that were **more than 1.7 times** the incidence rate of those with incomes $50,000 or higher.[4]
- People living in rural, deprived areas have 18–20% higher rates of lung cancer than people living in urban areas.[2]
- Lower-income populations have less access to health care, making it more likely they are diagnosed at later stages of diseases and conditions.[3]

Tobacco Industry Marketing & Targeting

- There is a higher density of tobacco retailers in low-income neighborhoods,[5] including more that are near schools,[6] than higher-income neighborhoods.
- Advertisements in low-income/minority neighborhoods are larger, have a lower mean advertised price, and are more likely to promote menthol products and occur within 1,000 feet of a school, compared to higher income/non-minority communities.[7]

- Tobacco companies have targeted women of low-income through distribution of discount coupons, point-of-sale discounts, direct-mail coupons, and development of targeted branding.[8]
- Over the past 60 years, tobacco companies have handed out **free cigarettes to children** in housing projects, **issued tobacco coupons with food stamps**, and explored giving away financial products like prepaid debit cards.[9] In 2014, the **tobacco industry spent $7.3 billion on discounts and coupons to lower prices**.[10]

Policy Actions to Take

Evidence-based tobacco prevention and treatment strategies, including culturally appropriate anti-smoking health marketing strategies and mass media campaigns, as well as CDC-recommended tobacco prevention and control programs and policies, will reduce the burden of disease among the low-income populations. Specific policy actions to take include:

1. Increase the price of **all** tobacco products, including e-cigarettes, through regular and significant tobacco tax increases.
2. Implement and enforce comprehensive smoke-free and tobacco-free policies.
3. Fully fund and sustain, evidence-based, statewide tobacco use prevention and treatment programs. **Currently, Maine's program is funded at approximately 30% of the U.S. CDC recommended level of $15.9 million.**
    a. Aggressive, directed counter-marketing and education campaigns
    b. Investments in surveillance and evaluation
    c. Increase reach of effective tobacco treatment programs, such as the ME Tobacco HelpLine

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To learn more, please visit www.MainePublicHealth.org.

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