



AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION

For science. For action. For health.

April 17, 2019

The Honorable Frank Pallone
Chair
House Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Donna Shalala
1320 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Pallone and Representative Shalala:

On behalf of the American Public Health Association, a diverse community of public health professionals that champions the health of all people and communities, I write to thank you for introducing the Reversing the Youth Tobacco Epidemic Act of 2019. We strongly support this legislation to combat tobacco use among the nation's youth and we applaud your leadership in addressing this public health crisis.

In 2017, new data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Food and Drug Administration and the National Institutes of Health showed that cigarette smoking among U.S. adults had reached the lowest level ever recorded. Roughly 14% of U.S. adults were current smokers in 2017 – a 67% decline since 1965. While we have made great progress in reducing tobacco use in the United States, it continues to be the driving force behind many preventable diseases and premature deaths in our nation, including among young Americans. Today, more than 16 million Americans are living with a disease caused by smoking and an estimated 480,000 die each year due to complications from tobacco use. The harmful effects of tobacco products endanger the health of users and, in the case of secondhand smoke, non-users as well. Secondhand smoke exposure contributes to approximately 41,000 deaths among nonsmoking adults and 400 deaths in infants each year. Now, the emergence of new tobacco products and devices threatens to erode the decades of progress we have made in reducing tobacco use in the U.S.

Recent increases in the use of e-cigarettes are driving increases in tobacco product use among our youth. Between 2017 and 2018, use of e-cigarettes grew by 78% among high school students and 48% among middle school students. This rapid growth in youth tobacco use is alarming and sets the stage for a public health crisis. Regular tobacco product use is primarily established during adolescence, which tobacco companies take great advantage of by marketing their deadly products to our youth. A successful public health intervention will hinge on delaying or deterring initiation, which your legislation champions.

By raising the minimum purchasing age for all tobacco products to 21, creating advertising and sales parity for all tobacco products including e-cigarettes, banning all flavored tobacco products including menthol, and expediting the timeline for graphic health warning compliance, your

legislation pushes back against the tide of industry influence, and gives an entire generation the chance to lead healthy lives.

The extent of the burden of disease, disability, and death that tobacco use imposes on the public's health is vast. Your comprehensive legislation is the first step towards accelerating progress in reducing the grave toll tobacco use has on our nation. We look forward to working with you and your colleagues to accomplish our shared mission to improve the public's health.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Georges C. Benjamin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial "G".

Georges C. Benjamin, MD
Executive Director