

NCI TOBACCO CONTROL MONOGRAPH SERIES

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Information for Decision Makers

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN PROMOTING AND REDUCING TOBACCO USE

MONOGRAPH NINETEEN

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In the twentieth century, mass media helped create new generations of tobacco users, even as evidence mounted about tobacco's toll on health. In the age of the Internet, as the scope of media influence has expanded and evolved, harnessing the media's power to discourage tobacco use is one of the major public health challenges of the new century. This National Cancer Institute monograph, *The Role of the Media in Promoting and Reducing Tobacco Use*, comes at a critical time as both the tobacco industry and public health advocates seek to use new and more diverse forms of media. Despite a roughly 50% decline in adult smoking prevalence over the past 40 years, smoking *remains* the nation's leading cause of premature, preventable death. About one in five Americans continue to smoke, and more than 4,000 young people smoke their first cigarette each day.


This monograph provides a comprehensive review of the scientific literature from many disciplines to analyze media strategies that promote or reduce tobacco use. In addition, the monograph explores and identifies strategies to leverage the media to best serve the public health in this high-stakes arena.

A fundamental theme of this monograph is the dynamic interplay between the forces that work to promote tobacco use and those that work to control or prevent it. For example, media campaigns have warned about the dangers of smoking while smoking proponents have sent out the message that cigarettes confer social status, athleticism, and glamour.

Key findings that may serve to inform tobacco control efforts include:

- Tobacco advertising and promotion increase smoking initiation among youth, and even brief exposure to tobacco advertising can influence adolescents.
- Only comprehensive bans on tobacco advertising and promotion reduce tobacco use. Partial bans are ineffective because they allow the tobacco industry to switch to alternative forms of media to promote its products.
- There is a causal relationship between exposure to tobacco use in the movies and youth smoking initiation. Depictions of smoking are pervasive in movies and occur in three-quarters or more of new box-office hits.

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- Mass media campaigns are effective in reducing smoking and have an even greater impact when conducted as part of a comprehensive tobacco control program.
 - Antitobacco campaigns sponsored by the tobacco industry have not worked to prevent youth smoking; some may even increase youth smoking.

A final section of the monograph reviews future directions in research. It notes the challenges presented by the dynamic interplay between tobacco promotion and tobacco control, the increasingly complex nature of the communications environment, and the growing socioeconomic disparities that characterize tobacco use in the United States and elsewhere. It highlights the fact that monitoring tobacco industry activities in the changing media environment will be a key task for the future.

The tobacco industry spends billions of dollars annually—more than \$13 billion in 2005—on tobacco advertising and promotion and uses an integrated, multifaceted marketing strategy. Reducing tobacco use will require countering these efforts, and antitobacco mass media campaigns that arouse strong negative emotions are effective in doing so. These campaigns need to be a key component of tobacco control programs.

In the United States, adult smoking has decreased approximately 50% since the 1960s—a process that started with the media’s attention to the 1964 Surgeon General’s report on smoking and health and continues today with media advocacy on behalf of tobacco control. However, tobacco use still accounts for 80 to 90% of all lung cancer deaths and nearly one-third of cancer deaths in developing countries. The World Health Organization predicts that tobacco-attributable mortality will increase in the coming decades if current smoking patterns continue. If this trend is to be reversed, an understanding of the media’s power to affect tobacco use must guide the way.

About the NCI Tobacco Control Monograph Series

The National Cancer Institute established the Tobacco Control Monograph series in 1991 to provide ongoing and timely information about emerging issues in smoking and tobacco prevention and control. Monographs are available at no cost in print and online.

For More Information

For more information or to order this monograph, go to <http://www.cancercontrol.cancer.gov/tcrb/monographs/19/index.html>. To order a free copy, call the NCI Cancer Information Service at 1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237) and ask for NIH Publication No. 07-6242.