

Tobacco Industry Targeting of the LGBT Community



While overall smoking rates have declined in recent years, smoking rates remain higher among specific subpopulations. These populations include individuals with lower educational attainment, lower socioeconomic status, from certain racial/ethnic groups, in the lesbian, gay, and bisexual community, with mental health conditions, and in the military particularly among those in the lowest pay grades. These differences are in large part due to the tobacco industry's targeting of vulnerable populations through advertising, price discounting and other marketing strategies.ⁱ Every year the tobacco industry spends \$9.5 billion marketing their deadly products in the United States.ⁱⁱ

“High rates of tobacco use within the LGBT community are due in part to the aggressive marketing by tobacco companies that sponsor events, bar promotions, giveaways, and advertisements.” – *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*

Tobacco Use in the LGBT Community

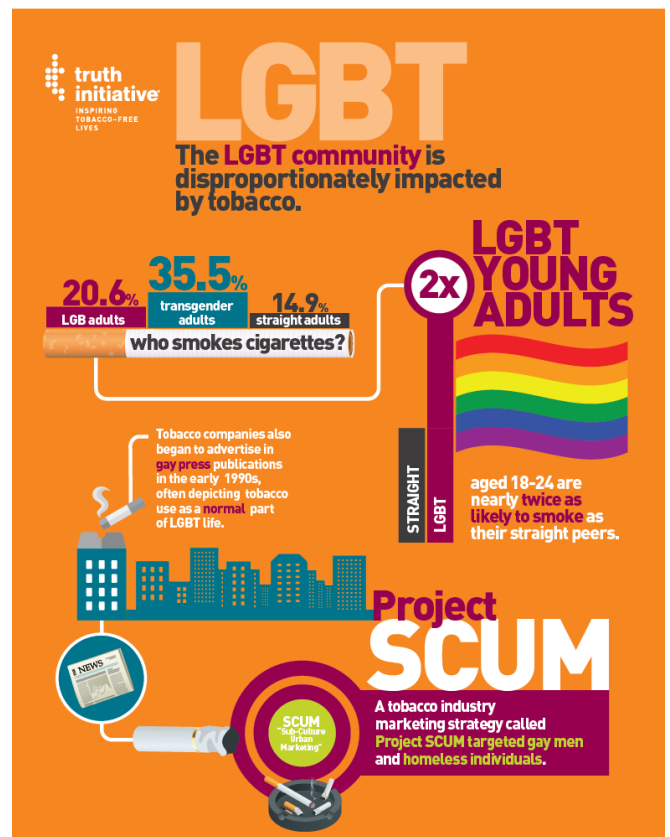
In 2016 smoking rates among gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals in the US are significantly higher than rates for straight individuals, 20.5 percent and 15.3 percent respectively.ⁱⁱⁱ Over one third (36 percent) of LGBT adults who smoke use menthol cigarettes, a higher rate than straight adults who smoke.^{iv} There is limited data available on smoking rates among transgender adults; however, one study found higher smoking rates among transgender adults than cisgender adults.^v

Every year more than 30,000 LGBT persons die from tobacco-related diseases.^{vi}

Tobacco Industry Targeting of LGBT Communities

Tobacco companies have utilized a variety of tactics to target LGBT communities. These have included:

- Developing marketing materials targeted at the LGBT community before most other industries.^{vii}
- Designing advertisements for LGBT publications that depict tobacco use as a “normal” part of LGBT life.^{viii}
- In 1995, one tobacco company created a marketing strategy known as “Project SCUM” or subculture urban marketing targeted at gay men and homeless individuals in San Francisco.^{ix}
- Using corporate philanthropy to demonstrate support of the LGBT community, another tobacco company settled a boycott by pledging a large donation to AIDS research, gaining them access to the LGBT market.^x
- Hosting promotions including LGBT bar nights featuring specific cigarette brands.^{xi}
- Sponsoring events at pride festivals. For example, one cigarette brand sponsored more than a dozen events at San Francisco’s pride festival alone in 2000.^{xii}
- Promoting menthol cigarettes which are easier to use and harder to quit.^{xiii}



- ⁱ The Truth Initiative, Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, American Heart Association and American Stroke Association, American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, American Lung Association, Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights, and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. A report entitled *Broken Promises to Our Children: A State-By-State Look at the 1998 State Tobacco Settlement 19 Years Later*. December, 2017. Available on-line at: <https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/what-we-do/us/statereport>.
- ⁱⁱ U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC), Cigarette Report for 2016, 2018, https://www.ftc.gov/system/files/documents/reports/federal-trade-commission-cigarette-report-2016-federal-trade-commission-smokeless-tobacco-report/ftc_cigarette_report_for_2016_0.pdf [data for top 5 manufacturers only].; FTC, Smokeless Tobacco Report for 2016, 2018, https://www.ftc.gov/system/files/documents/reports/federal-trade-commission-cigarette-report-2016-federal-trade-commission-smokeless-tobacco-report/ftc_smokeless_tobacco_report_for_2016_0.pdf [Data for top 5 manufacturers only].
- ⁱⁱⁱ CDC. Current Cigarette Smoking Among Adults – United States, 2016. January 19, 2018. MMWR 67 (2); 53-59. https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/67/wr/mm6702a1.htm?s_cid=mm6702a1_w
- ^{iv} Fallin A, Goodin AJ, King BA. Menthol Cigarette Smoking Among Lesbian Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Adults. *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*. 2015 January; 48(1): 93-97.
- ^v Buchting FO, Emory KT, Scout, Kim Y, Fagan P, Vera LE, Emery S. Transgender Use of Cigarettes, Cigars, and E-cigarettes in a National Study. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* July 2017.
- ^{vi} CDC. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Persons and Tobacco Use. Updated February 28, 2017. <https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/disparities/lgbt/index.htm>
- ^{vii} American Lung Association. Smoking Out a Deadly Threat: Tobacco Use in the LGBT Community. 2010. <http://www.lung.org/assets/documents/research/lgbt-report.pdf>
- ^{viii} CDC. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Persons and Tobacco Use. Updated February 28, 2017. <https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/disparities/lgbt/index.htm>
- ^{ix} The Truth Initiative. Tobacco Use in LGBT Communities. February 2018. <https://truthinitiative.org/news/tobacco-social-justice-issue-smoking-and-lgbt-communities>. See Also American Lung Association. Smoking Out a Deadly Threat: Tobacco Use in the LGBT Community. 2010. <http://www.lung.org/assets/documents/research/lgbt-report.pdf>
- ^x The Truth Initiative. Tobacco Use in LGBT Communities. February 2018. <https://truthinitiative.org/news/tobacco-social-justice-issue-smoking-and-lgbt-communities>. See also Ramirez A. Philip Morris to Increase AIDS Donations. *The New York Times*. 05/30/1991, 1991; Company News.
- ^{xi} The Truth Initiative. Tobacco Use in LGBT Communities. February 2018. <https://truthinitiative.org/news/tobacco-social-justice-issue-smoking-and-lgbt-communities>
- ^{xii} The Truth Initiative. One Trend That's Changing Pride Festivals for the Better. 2017. <https://truthinitiative.org/news/one-trend-changing-pride-festivals-better>
- ^{xiii} CDC. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Persons and Tobacco Use. Updated February 28, 2017. <https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/disparities/lgbt/index.htm>