Tobacco use remains the leading cause of preventable disease and death in the United States. Smoking harms nearly every organ in the body and increases the risk for many types of cancer, heart attack, stroke, COPD, and other diseases. Disparities among adult and youth tobacco use rates and related smoking-caused death rates continue to persist between different racial/ethnic groups across the nation, however, among Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders (AANHPIs), the three leading causes of death are all tobacco-related.

Although Asian Americans have the lowest smoking rate of all major American racial/ethnic groups, many people are still struggling to quit and youth continue to become addicted.

**Tobacco Use Among Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders**

- Asian Americans have the lowest smoking rate (5.4%) of all major American racial/ethnic groups.¹
  - Smoking among Asian American men is notably higher than smoking among Asian American women (13.5% vs. 5.0%).²
  - AANHPI communities are diverse, including well over fifty ethnic and language groups of people.
    - Survey data from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) 2010-2013 show that cigarette smoking varies considerably by country of origin and nativity. For example, cigarette smoking prevalence is higher among Filipinos (12.6%) than Chinese (7.6%) or Asian Indian (67.6%), with the highest rates among Vietnamese (16.3%) and Korean (20.0%).³
    - Additional national data from the 2016-2018 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) of adults ages 18 and over also found substantial variations in current smoking rates by ethnicity with 4% among Asian Indian adults, 6% among Chinese adults, and 10% among Filipino adults.⁴
    - According to data from the 2022 Hawaii Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), Native Hawaiians living in Hawaii are more likely to smoke than their White counterparts (18% vs. 10%, respectively).⁵

- Menthol cigarettes increase youth smoking, are more addictive, and are harder to quit.⁶ According to 2018 NSDUH data, 47% of Asian American smokers use menthol cigarettes, compared to 29% of White smokers.⁷

- Electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) are the second most frequently reported tobacco product among adults.⁸ In 2021, 2.9% of Asian American adults reported using e-cigarettes.

- E-cigarettes are the most popular tobacco product among Asian American high school students. In 2021, 5.5% were current e-cigarette users.⁹ Less than 1 percent (0.6%) of Asian American high school students were current smokers.

- E-cigarette use among Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NHPI) high school students is the highest of all racial/ethnic groups at 24.7 percent. NHPI high schoolers also smoke cigarettes at a higher rate than other racial/ethnic groups (6.9%).¹⁰
Health Burden of Tobacco Among Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders

- Cancer is the leading cause of death among Asian Americans and the second-leading cause among NHPIs. More than 19,000 Asian American/Pacific Islanders are diagnosed with a tobacco-related cancer each year and more than 9,000 die from a tobacco-related cancer each year.

- Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death among AANHPIs. It is estimated that among AANHPIs, approximately 6000 will be diagnosed with lung cancer each year and 4,000 will die from lung cancer each year.

- Because of variations in culture, exposures in country of origin, and social determinants of health, aggregated health statistics for AANHPI populations often mask vast diversity and disparities in cancer burden. Among men, lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death for all nine AANHPI ethnic groups, ranging from 15% of cancer deaths among Asian Indian men to 27% among Guamanian men. However, among AANHPI women, lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer for the following five AANHPI ethnic groups: Native Hawaiian (23% of cancer deaths), Chinese (22%), Vietnamese (21%), Japanese (20%), and Korean (19%).

- Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death among NHPIs and the second leading cause among Asian Americans. For both groups, stroke is also a leading cause of death. Tobacco use is an important risk factor for cardiovascular disease and stroke.

- Cigarette smoking is a cause of diabetes. In 2019, NHPI adults were about twice as likely (2.19 times) as Non-Hispanic White adults to die from diabetes.

The Tobacco Industry Targets Asian Americans Using a Variety of Marketing and Promotion Strategies

- Tobacco companies found promise in marketing to Asian Americans because of high population growth, high smoking rates in their countries of origin, increasing consumer power and a high brand loyalty to American products.

- Targeted marketing to AANHPI communities throughout the years have included:
  - Sponsorships of East Asian, Asian American, and Pacific Islander community festivals;
  - Heavy presence of billboard and in-store advertising in predominantly urban Asian American communities; and
  - Financial contributions to community organizations and Asian American business associations.

- In 1999, Philip Morris targeted Black, Hispanic, and Asian American women with their Virginia Slims "Find Your Voice" campaign.

- In 2004, R.J. Reynolds launched their new Camel brand, Kauai Kolada, appropriating the image of a hula dancer to promote their pineapple- and coconut-flavored cigarettes.

Helping Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders Quit Smoking

- The large majority of Asian American smokers are interested in quitting smoking. 70% of Asian adult current cigarette smokers want to quit smoking cigarettes, and 69% report that they tried to quit during the past year. According to the 2021 NHIS, 70.1% of Asian American adults who ever smoked cigarettes reported having quit.

- Compared to White smokers, Asian American smokers are less likely to receive quitting advice from health care providers and less likely to use evidence-based treatments to help them quit. The quality of healthcare suffers when there are language barriers between provider and patient.
Asian American smokers can get help quitting smoking by calling the Asian Smokers’ Quitline (ASQ), a free nationwide Asian-language quit smoking service that offers counseling and additional information in Chinese (1-800-838-8917), Korean (1-800-556-5564), and Vietnamese (1-800-778-8440).25

Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, May 22, 2024 / Marela Minosa

25 http://www.asiansmokersquitline.org/about-asq/