

Supporting youth engagement in policy-making as a dual weapon against the Tobacco, Nicotine and Vaping Industry

The Tobacco Industry is the backbone of the biggest public health threat fueled by the most addictive and deadly product. For decades, this industry is responsible for millions of deaths. Nearly as soon as the Tobacco Industry was shaped, it has been deploying youth-targeting approaches identifying young people as potential long-term users as an effective means to continuously substitute those who died due to tobacco-related diseases and, thus, maintain its immense body of “faithful” customers. The subtle success of global tobacco control in terms of the decreasing number of cigarette smokers was counteracted/backlashed by a solid playing card of novel tobacco products. “Novel tobacco products” is a composite name of a strongly diversified market of new products created by the industry to disorient the global tobacco control efforts and attract more smokers. In contrast to cigarettes, novel tobacco products have been accurately crafted, branded, and promoted among the youth. The fact that adolescents are physiologically more vulnerable to developing dependence and the fact the adolescent tobacco use behavior sustains for the whole lifetime is particularly disturbing for the tobacco control community.

The reports across regions indicate that youth tobacco use is being accelerated in association with the new products entering the markets which later transforms into a dual use of conventional and novel tobacco products. There is compelling evidence that highlights the deliberate efforts of the tobacco industry to target youth as a key demographic. Through various marketing and promotional strategies, the industry has sought to attract a new generation of consumers, posing significant public health challenges.

Evidence of Youth-Targeted Marketing

Flavored Products: The introduction and widespread availability of flavored tobacco products, often with appealing and youth-centric flavors, indicate a strategic effort to make these products more enticing to young individuals.

Packaging design: The use of vibrant and visually appealing packaging for tobacco products is a tactic employed to capture the attention of young consumers. Bright colors and attractive designs contribute to making these products more alluring to youth.

Placement in Youth-Oriented Settings: Evidence suggests intentional placement of tobacco advertisements and products in locations frequented by young people, such as convenience stores near schools and popular social venues, aiming to increase visibility and accessibility.

Social Media Marketing: The tobacco industry has adapted to digital platforms, utilizing social media to promote their products. Influencer collaborations, sponsored content, and engaging campaigns on platforms popular among youth contribute to targeted marketing efforts.

Youth engagement against the Industry

Tobacco control is still behind new products' proliferating and yet mostly unregulated landscape. Therefore, youth engagement in tobacco control is an important weapon to educate and empower young people to demand and fight for their rights and health. Youth engagement in health policy and tobacco control is increasingly recognized as a crucial component in addressing the challenges posed by tobacco use and novel tobacco products among young people.

Benefits Youth Engagement

Targeted Marketing: The tobacco industry often employs marketing strategies specifically designed to attract young consumers. Involving youth in policy discussions allows for insights into the effectiveness of regulations against such targeted marketing.

Prevention Programs: Youth engagement aids in the development and implementation of effective prevention programs. Including the perspectives of young individuals ensures that interventions resonate with their peers and address the unique factors influencing tobacco use among the youth.

Advocacy and Awareness: Engaging young people in tobacco control initiatives fosters a culture of advocacy and awareness. Youth can play a pivotal role in educating their peers, schools, and communities about the dangers of tobacco use, thereby contributing to a wider dissemination of anti-smoking messages.

Policy Innovation: The fresh perspectives and innovative thinking of youth can drive the development of progressive policies. Involving young voices helps in crafting strategies that are adaptable to evolving trends and technologies influencing tobacco consumption.

Policy Implications of youth engagement in tobacco control

Strengthening Regulations: The evidence presented underscores the need for strengthened regulations and policies to counteract the industry's targeting of youth. This may include stricter marketing restrictions, packaging regulations, and increased penalties for violations

Public Awareness Campaigns: Public health campaigns aimed at raising awareness about the tactics employed by the tobacco industry to target youth can empower communities and individuals to resist these influences.

The evidence of the tobacco industry targeting youth is clear and necessitates a comprehensive response from policymakers, public health officials, and communities alike. By addressing these targeted strategies, society can take significant steps towards safeguarding the well-being of the youth and preventing the initiation of tobacco use among this vulnerable demographic.

Challenges and Considerations

Vulnerability to Influence: While engaging youth is crucial, it is essential to protect them from potential industry influence. Rigorous measures must be in place to ensure that policy discussions remain focused on public health objectives rather than commercial interests.

Diverse Representation: Efforts should be made to include diverse voices from various socioeconomic backgrounds, ethnicities, and geographic locations to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by different communities.

ENSPnext: the path towards a tobacco- and nicotine-free generation

In light of the alarming prevalence of tobacco use, particularly among European adolescents, ENSP took a proactive step by establishing a group of dedicated youth. This initiative is aiming to cultivate the next generation of tobacco control experts while also addressing the pressing issue of tobacco consumption among young people. The members of the group have the chance to interact with ENSP seniors and more experienced

partners to enrich themselves with experiences and knowledge and become future leaders in the tobacco control field.

ENSPnext's primary focus is to encourage and create a tobacco-free generation. All this is made possible through training for new tobacco control advocates, allowing them to provide national assistance with resources and skills as well as create cross-border and interdisciplinary information exchange. Hence, they are able to maximize the public health impact of Europe's collective youth tobacco control efforts.

ENSPnext strives to shape young people into tobacco control leaders. Our goal is to operate at both national and European levels, fostering a generation free from the burden of tobacco and any associated novel tobacco products. Therefore, we tackle the use of evidence-based research in policy and practice to work together towards our common goal of informing and preventing youth from being lured into a lifetime of addiction.

The mission of ENSPnext is to carry on activities in order to accomplish the general ENSP mission and vision, as mentioned in the Statutes. As a group of advocates in the tobacco control field, ENSPnext's mission is to give space to youth members of ENSP member organizations and linked organizations to participate and gain experience in cross-generational dialogue, strengthening tobacco policy research, and prevention. ENSPnext, through opening doors for collaborations for youth with individuals of ENSP member organizations, as well as through cooperation between organizations. Additionally, it carries out capacity-building activities for advocacy action and tobacco policy changes, building a generation of advocates for societal change.

Conclusion

Youth engagement in health policy and tobacco control is pivotal for crafting effective, informed, and sustainable strategies. By actively involving young people in these initiatives, society can work toward creating a tobacco-free environment, safeguarding the well-being of future generations.



Evidence of youth targeting:

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