Tobacco Harm Reduction: A Safer Path Forward

Cigarette smoking remains a major cause of preventable disease and death. Still, adults who smoke can reduce their health risks by quitting or completely switching from combustible cigarettes to lower-risk alternatives. In the Hispanic community in the United States, about 7% smoke cigarettes daily. While this varies by location and ethnic background, it's still a large number that contributes to respiratory diseases like asthma and chronic pulmonary disease. To this day, about 4.5 million Hispanic adults currently have asthma, which excessive smoking behaviors might cause. That's why the Tobacco Harm Reduction Program aims to help people who smoke by reducing the health risks of tobacco and moving toward less harmful products as a step toward breaking free from the cigarette smoking cycle. **At the NHHF, we support evidence-based tobacco harm reduction strategies that give adults who smoke access to accurate information and lower-risk, smoke-free alternatives, such as FDA-authorized e-cigarettes.**

Tobacco Combustion is the Primary Contributor to Smoking-Related Disease

Nicotine is addictive and is not risk-free; however, most smoking-related diseases are linked to exposure to toxic chemicals generated through the combustion of tobacco. These products fall along a continuum of risk, with combustible cigarettes posing the highest level of risk. For adults who smoke, transitioning away from combustible cigarettes to lower-risk, non-combustible alternatives may substantially reduce exposure to harmful chemicals. This impact also extends beyond those who smoke directly. CDC data indicate that 17.2% of Hispanic adults and 26% of Hispanic children were exposed to secondhand smoke, reinforcing the need to move people away from tobacco products for their safety and that of those around them.

Lower-Risk Alternatives Can Help Adults Stop Smoking

Scientific evidence increasingly supports the use of nicotine e-cigarettes, patches, gum, and other products as an option for adults who smoke. A 2026 JAMA clinical recommendation found that nicotine e-cigarettes can be more effective for smoking cessation than nicotine replacement therapies such as patches or gum. Clinicians are encouraged to include e-cigarettes in patient-centered conversations about smoking cessation. The goal should be complete switching, rather than continued long-term use of cigarettes. Adults who choose e cigarettes for harm reduction should use products authorized for marketing by the FDA.

Accurate Information is Important for Improving Health Outcomes for All

Misperceptions about nicotine and the relative risks of tobacco products can prevent adults who smoke from considering less harmful alternatives. Clear, culturally appropriate information is especially important for Hispanic and other underserved communities, enabling adults to make informed health decisions. Data from the CDC indicate that Hispanics born in the United States are more likely to smoke tobacco products than those born outside of the United States.

Protecting Youth While Supporting Adults

Tobacco harm reduction is not about encouraging tobacco or nicotine use. Youths and adults who currently do not use tobacco products should not start using nicotine either. Policies should maintain strong youth protections while ensuring that adults who smoke have accurate information and access to FDA-authorized alternatives. The tobacco harm reduction program should start the process for people who currently have a tobacco addiction to move to a less harmful alternative while keeping people informed of the negative health effects that nicotine and other products could cause. Preventing tobacco use among youth should be the main goal since these types of products distort the brain functions of a developing person's body.

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