



# Native Menthol Youth Coalition Tobacco Use Research

## Indigenous Peoples Task Force

### Commercial tobacco use in Minneapolis Native Community

Traditional tobacco is a part of Native spiritual practices, used for prayer, during funerals, as gifts, and during ceremonies. These traditional uses of tobacco were banned by the United States Government until 1978; as a result, commercial tobacco replaced traditional tobacco in cultural practices. Unfortunately, Native Americans became addicted, leading to increased prevalence of commercial tobacco use. Today, the Native American smoking rate (59%) is significantly higher than the rate of all Minnesota adults (14.4%).

### Data Collection and Results

In March 2016, the Indigenous Peoples Task Force convened ten youth to form a Native Menthol Youth Coalition to investigate the rising rates of Menthol tobacco use in the Native community, specifically, *why Native youth begin smoking*. The coalition developed and administered three different surveys with adults and teens to learn more about smoking initiation and preferred policy recommendations for tobacco use prevention. There were 58 responses from adult smokers, 18 from adult non-smokers, and 53 from youth between the ages of eight and 17. Key findings include:

- 60% of smokers used Menthol cigarettes.
- Majority of smokers began using tobacco because a friend or family member smokes or offered them a cigarette.
- 58% of all adults support more checks on stores to see if minors are being sold tobacco products.
- 50% of all adults support restricting where tobacco is sold to tobacco-only retailers and raising the age to purchase tobacco to 21.

Coalition participants also conducted five tobacco retailer store assessments and 20 Congratulate and Educate compliance checks; results indicated that flavored tobacco products are available at a much cheaper price than is currently legal and minors are able to purchase tobacco products.

### Barriers

**Increased Access.** Adult smokers stated that they began smoking because a friend or family member smoked cigarettes. Increased access to tobacco products was also reflected in data collected from youth as well. Specifically, 53% of youth respondents have been offered a cigarette, 70% have a friend who smokes, and 85% have a family member who smokes.

**Compliance Issues.** Coalition participants observed minors smoking in plain sight of a police officer who knew they were under age and smoking in public spaces where signage otherwise indicated tobacco use is prohibited such as parks. Store assessments and compliance checks also demonstrated illegal pricing strategies and sale of tobacco products to minors.

**Social Norms.** Survey results showed that smoking is perceived as a normal activity in the community. National research identifies additional influencers including targeted advertising and identity imagery on tobacco products.

**Lack of Education.** Menthol cigarettes are harder to quit and the minty taste makes them appealing to youth. Only 53% of youth said they have learned about the effects of cigarettes on their body. Similarly, 75% of non-smokers believe that people don't know how harmful tobacco is to health.

### Recommendations

- ➊ Raise the price of Menthol cigarettes.
- ➋ Limit the sale of all tobacco products, including Menthol, to tobacco-only retailers.
- ➌ Meaningfully engage the Minneapolis Native community to develop and implement policy changes (as described above).
- ➍ Increase education on commercial and traditional tobacco for youth before age 13.