

# THE REAL COST™

# A Decade of Impact



What is



For 10 years, the Food and Drug Administration's Center for Tobacco Products' (FDA) **"The Real Cost" public education campaign** has delivered timely, relevant and evidence-based communication strategies to safeguard current and future generations from the devastating consequences of tobacco-related disease, disability and death.

The campaign was developed based on **extensive research** and **behavioral science** and has evolved to break through changing tobacco and media landscapes.

Through the campaign, FDA uses a mix of **modern social marketing** and **advertising tactics** across relevant media channels to educate teens about the harms of using tobacco products.



**"The Real Cost" has contributed to significant declines in teen tobacco use, with cigarette smoking at an all-time low<sup>i</sup> and e-cigarette use at its lowest in a decade.<sup>ii</sup>**

### Increasing Awareness:

In 2023, **67%** of youth were aware of at least one "The Real Cost" e-cigarette campaign advertisement.<sup>iii</sup>



### Changing Beliefs:

**A longitudinal study ending in 2021** found that digital and social media campaigns increased teens' beliefs about the harms and consequences of e-cigarette use.<sup>iii</sup>



### Driving Impact:



From its launch in February 2014 to November 2016, "The Real Cost" prevented up to **587,000 youth** from starting smoking<sup>iv</sup>



"The Real Cost" will save the country more than **\$53 billion** by reducing smoking-related costs like early loss of life, costly medical care, lost wages, lower productivity, and increased disability.<sup>iv</sup>

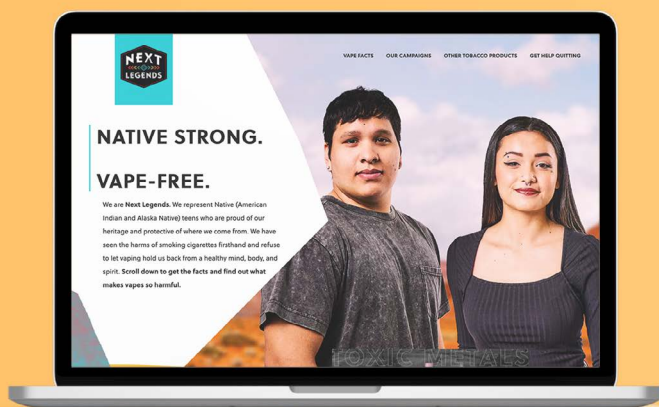
### Lessons learned for public health practitioners

- **Use a continual science-based cycle** of teen audience segmentation, formative research, monitoring and evaluation to inform strategic shifts necessary to continue affecting behavior change.
- **Be ready and willing to adapt quickly** as teens' needs, environments and media landscapes change. FDA has found success through social listening, following and analyzing search trends, and studying the media landscape.
- **Leverage the interest areas of teens.** Recommend: (music, sports, gaming) to deliver messages through channels and content where they choose to spend time.
- **Create and deliver content in teens' voices** by using their language, experiences, and relatable situations and settings like schools, the dinner table, driving with parents, and school sports games.

## Creating a tobacco-free future



- Tobacco use is still the leading cause of preventable disease and death in the U.S.
- Sustained national tobacco public education campaigns like “The Real Cost” can prevent tobacco use and protect future generations from tobacco-related harms.
- FDA will continue to monitor trends of all tobacco product use among youth, including newer products like nicotine pouches, and evolve the campaign to address emerging threats.
- Working with public health organizations and leaders, we’ll provide the most accurate, up-to-date information, so teens know the real cost of tobacco use.



### “Native Strong”

CTP creates audience-specific campaigns. Its newest effort is “**Next Legends,**” which uses unique branding and tailored messaging that is specifically designed to inspire a new generation of American Indian/Alaska Native teens to live Native strong and vape-free.



### Continued Measurable Success



“**The Real Cost**” campaign educates youth on the health consequences of cigarettes and other tobacco products. The campaign is constantly optimizing content and placement strategies to ensure reach, resonance and behavior change among teens. In 2018, the campaign began prioritizing e-cigarette prevention messaging to combat increasing use of e-cigarettes among youth. Today, youth e-cigarette use is at its lowest in a decade.

## REFERENCES

- i. Jamal A, Park-Lee E, Birdsey J, et al. Tobacco Product Use Among Middle and High School Students — National Youth Tobacco Survey, United States, 2024. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2024;73:917–924.
- ii. Park-Lee E, Jamal A, Cowan H, et al. Notes from the Field: E-Cigarette and Nicotine Pouch Use Among Middle and High School Students — United States, 2024. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2024;73:774–778.
- iii. Anna MacMonegle, Morgane Bennett, Jessica L Speer, Erin Keely O’Brien, Lindsay Pitzer, Allie Jaarsma, Anh Nguyen Zardt, Jennifer Duke. Evaluating The Real Cost Digital and Social Media Campaign: Longitudinal Effects of Campaign Exposure on E-cigarette Beliefs, *Nicotine & Tobacco Research*, Volume 26, Issue Supplement\_1, February 2024, Pages S19–S26.
- iv. Impact of The Real Cost Media Campaign on Youth Smoking Initiation, Duke, Jennifer C. et al. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, Volume 57, Issue 5, 645 – 651

Together, we can leave tobacco in the past for a healthier future.

Visit [www.fda.gov/tobacco-products/public-health-education](http://www.fda.gov/tobacco-products/public-health-education)



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