

Tobacco's Impact on Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Communities



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 (3.8%) 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.
 - National data from the 2019-2021 National Health Survey (NHIS) of adults aged 18 and over showed variations in current cigarette smoking rates by country of origin and nativity with 8.6% among Filipino adults, 7.5% among Vietnamese adults, 7.2% among Korean adults, 6.4% among Chinese adults, and 3.2% among Asian Indian adults.³
 - 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).⁴
- Menthol cigarettes increase youth smoking, are more addictive, and are harder to quit.⁵ According to 2018 NSDUH data, 47% of Asian American smokers use menthol cigarettes, compared to 29% of White smokers.⁶
- Electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) are the second most frequently reported tobacco product among adults.⁷ In 2024, 3.3% of Asian American adults reported using e-cigarettes.⁸
- E-cigarettes are the most popular tobacco product among both Asian American and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NHPI) high school students. In the 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), 6.2 percent of Asian American students and 14.1 percent of NHPI students were current e-cigarette users.⁹ The rate of current smoking for Asian American high school students is 1 percent and the rate for NHPI students is 1.6 percent.

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.¹⁰ 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.¹¹

¹ The 2024 National Youth Tobacco Survey (NYTS), using a different methodology than the YRBS, found that 3.1% of Asian high school students were current e-cigarette users.

Tobacco's Impact on AANHPI Communities

- Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death among AANHPIs.¹² 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.¹³
- 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 groups², ranging from 15% of cancer deaths among Asian Indian men to 27% among Guamanian men.¹⁴ However, among AANHPI women, lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death 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 second leading cause of death among NHPs and the second leading cause among Asian Americans. For both groups, stroke is also a leading cause of death.¹⁵ Tobacco use is an important risk factor for cardiovascular disease and stroke.
- Cigarette smoking is a cause of diabetes.¹⁶ In 2022, NHP adults were more than twice as likely (2.34 times) as Non-Hispanic White adults to die from diabetes.¹⁷

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.¹⁸
- Targeted marketing to AANHPI communities throughout the years have included:
 - Sponsorships of East Asian, Asian American, and Pacific Islander community festivals;¹⁹
 - Heavy presence of billboard and in-store advertising in predominantly urban Asian American communities;²⁰ and
 - Financial contributions to community organizations and Asian American business associations.²¹
- 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 majority of Asian American smokers are interested in quitting smoking. About half (53.5%) of Asian adult current cigarette smokers want to quit smoking, and 59.5% report that they tried to quit during the past year.²² According to the 2021 NHIS, 70.1% of Asian American adults who ever smoked cigarettes reported having quit.²³
- Asian American smokers are much less likely than some other racial/ethnic groups to receive quitting advice from health care providers and use evidence-based treatments to help them quit. In 2022, only one-third (34.3%) of Asian-American smokers received advice to quit from a health professional and only 15.9% used evidence-based cessation treatments.²⁴ Barriers to accessing treatment, including cultural and language barriers, need to be addressed to ensure equitable access to cessation treatment.

² The nine Asian American and NHP ethnic groups include Guamanian, Samoan, Vietnamese, Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Native Hawaiian, Japanese, and Asian Indian.

Tobacco's Impact on AANHPI Communities

- 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, Korean, and Vietnamese.²⁵



Chinese

1-800-838-8917



Korean

1-800-556-5564



Vietnamese

1-800-778-8440

Asian Smokers' Quitline Phone Numbers.

¹ National Center for Health Statistics. Percentage of current cigarette smoking for adults aged 18 and over, United States, 2024. National Health Interview Survey. Generated interactively: Aug 13 2025 from https://wwwn.cdc.gov/NHISDataQueryTool/SHS_adult/index.html.

² Ra CK, Pehlivan N, Kim H, Sussman S, Unger JB, Businelle MS. Smoking prevalence among Asian Americans: Associations with education, acculturation, and gender. *Preventive Medicine Reports*. 2022 Dec 1;30:102035.

³ NCHS. Percentage of current cigarette smoking for adults aged 18 and over, United States, 2019-2021. National Health Interview Survey. Generated interactively: September 8 2024 from https://wwwn.cdc.gov/NHISDataQueryTool/SHS_adult3yr/index.html.

⁴ American Cancer Society. Cancer Facts & Figures for Asian American, Native Hawaiian, & Other Pacific Islander People 2024-2026. Atlanta: American Cancer Society; 2024.

⁵ FDA. Preliminary Scientific Evaluation of the Possible Public Health Effects of Menthol versus Nonmenthol Cigarettes (2013) <http://www.fda.gov/downloads/ScienceResearch/SpecialTopics/PeerReviewofScientificInformationandAssessments/UCM361598.pdf>.

⁶ Delnevo, CD, et al., "Banning Menthol Cigarettes: A Social Justice Issue Long Overdue," *Nicotine & Tobacco Research*, 22(10): 1673-1675, 2020.

⁷ Cornelius ME, Loretan CG, Jamal A, et al. Tobacco Product Use Among Adults - United States, 2021. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2023;72:475-483. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7218a1>.

⁸ NCHS. Percentage of current electronic cigarette use for adults aged 18 and over, United States, 2024. National Health Interview Survey. Generated interactively: Aug 13 2025 from https://wwwn.cdc.gov/NHISDataQueryTool/SHS_adult/index.html.

⁹ CDC. 2023 High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data. Available at <http://yrbs-explorer.services.cdc.gov/>. Accessed on Nov 5 2024.

¹⁰ Curtin SC, et al. Deaths: Leading causes for 2022. *National Vital Statistics Reports*; vol 73 no 10. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. 2024. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.15620/cdc/164020>. See Table D. Number of deaths and percentage of total deaths for the 10 leading causes of death, by race and Hispanic origin: United States, 2022.

¹¹ CDC, "Vital Signs: Disparities in Tobacco-Related Cancer Incidence and Mortality—United States, 2004-2013," *Morbidity & Mortality Weekly Report*, 65(44): 1212-1218, <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/65/wr/mm6544a3.htm>.

¹² American Cancer Society. Cancer Facts & Figures 2026. Atlanta: American Cancer Society; 2026. See Table 9. Incidence and Mortality Rates for Selected Cancers by Race and Ethnicity, US.

¹³ American Cancer Society. Cancer Facts & Figures 2016, <http://www.cancer.org/acs/groups/content/@research/documents/document/acspc-047079.pdf>.

¹⁴ American Cancer Society. Cancer Facts & Figures for Asian American, Native Hawaiian, & Other Pacific Islander People 2024-2026. Atlanta: American Cancer Society; 2024.

¹⁵ Curtin SC, et al. Deaths: Leading causes for 2022. *National Vital Statistics Reports*; vol 73 no 10. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. 2024. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.15620/cdc/164020>. See Table D. Number of deaths and percentage of total deaths for the 10 leading causes of death, by race and Hispanic origin: United States, 2022.

¹⁶ HHS, The Health Consequences of Smoking—50 Years of Progress: A Report of the Surgeon General, 2014, <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/reports/50-years-of-progress/>.

¹⁷ Xu JQ, et al. Deaths: Final data for 2022. *Natl Vital Stat Rep*. 2025 Jun;74(4):1-137. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.15620/cdc/174588>. See Table 11. Age-adjusted death rate for 113 selected causes, Enterocolitis due to *Clostridium difficile*, COVID-19, dementia-related causes, drug-induced causes, alcohol-induced causes, and firearm-related injuries, by Hispanic origin and race and sex: United States, 2022.

¹⁸ Muggli ME, et al. Targeting of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders by the tobacco industry: results from the Minnesota Tobacco Document Depository. *Tobacco Control*. 2002;11(3):201.

¹⁹ Fellows K, Rubin DL. Identities for Sale: How the Tobacco Industry Construed Asians, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islanders. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*. 2006;35(3):265-292.

²⁰ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Tobacco Use Among U.S. Racial/ Ethnic Minority Groups - African Americans, American Indians and Alaska Natives, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, and Hispanics: a report of the Surgeon General. 1998.

²¹ Muggli ME, et al. Targeting of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders by the tobacco industry: results from the Minnesota Tobacco Document Depository. *Tobacco Control*. 2002;11(3):201.

²² VanFrank B, Malarcher A, Cornelius ME, Schecter A, Jamal A, Tynan M. Adult Smoking Cessation — United States, 2022. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2024;73:633-641. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7329a1>.

²³ Cornelius ME, Loretan CG, Jamal A, et al. Tobacco Product Use Among Adults – United States, 2021. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2023;72:475–483. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7218a1>.

²⁴ VanFrank B, Malarcher A, Cornelius ME, Schechter A, Jamal A, Tynan M. Adult Smoking Cessation — United States, 2022. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2024;73:633–641. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7329a1>.

²⁵ <https://www.asiansmokersquitline.org/about-asq/>.