Florida faces challenges in State of Tobacco Control report

By Cierra Richardson | Online Editor On February 6, 2019

The American Lung Association’s “State of Tobacco Control” report addresses the state and federal governments efforts to reduce and prevent tobacco use, including its impact on young people using e-cigarettes.

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Tobacco causes more than 480,000 deaths in the United States every year. Perhaps even more alarming: More than 16 million Americans are living with a disease caused by smoking.

In a recent study known as the “State of Tobacco Control” report conducted by the American Lung Association, studies show that across the U.S., states have failed in their efforts to reduce the use of tobacco.

According to the report, more young people are showing an interest in trying tobacco products. In 2018, 27.1 percent of high school students used at least one tobacco product, increasing dramatically from 19.6 percent in 2017.

With such alarming numbers, the ALA is calling on lawmakers to tackle the issue of tobacco use nationwide and reduce the number of millennials smoking tobacco and using nicotine products.

This issue is also affecting people locally, in Florida.

Florida received a failing grade in various categories including in its efforts for tobacco prevention, strengthening the smoke-free air law and failure to increase the minimum age requirement of tobacco products from 18 to 21.
FAMU nursing major Kendi Ford, who learned about Florida’s failing grades, said this issue is upsetting.

“It is disheartening to hear about these reports because it’s a big issue and the issue doesn’t seem to be going anywhere fast,” said Ford.

In Florida, according to the Bureau of Tobacco Free Florida, the percentage of young people between the ages of 11-17 using e-cigarettes has increased by 60 percent from 2017 to 2018.

Within its failed efforts for tobacco use, the ALA says that the increase of young people smoking has now become a major issue. It is asking Florida leaders to put more of a focus on electronic cigarette use.

The Tobacco Free Florida AHEC Tobacco Program at the Florida State University College of Medicine is pushing to strengthen the healthcare system to deliver effective tobacco-use treatments.

FSU AHEC Program manager Rebecca Carter said she has noticed the use of electronic cigarettes among young people and believes that it is now time to shift the focus to nicotine products.

“There has been a drastic decrease in smoking over the years, which is great but now with the e-cigarettes, there has been a drastic increase,” said Carter. “I think we are really taking a step back from some of the advances we (have) made with e-cigarettes being everywhere.”

The use of electronic cigarettes by young people has increased.

According to the 2018 National Youth Tobacco Survey conducted by the Center for Disease Control and Preventions, nationally the amount of electronic cigarette use among young people has risen 78 percent for high school students from 2017 to 2018.

Electronic cigarettes, also known as “e-cigarettes,” are battery-powered devices that are usually designed to resemble a cigarette. However, e-cigarettes are used to inhale nicotine, containing vapor rather than tobacco like a traditional cigarette.

Among the use of e-cigarettes, there are different flavors used within the vapor, increasing young people’s admiration for trying it.

One brand in particular, known as “JUUL,” has gained much popularity increasing the interest of thousands of millennials in trying out the vaping device.

ALA officials believe that with this increase in young people using the products, this adds up to one million additional kids using the product, leading to harmful effects to their body.

According to the Surgeon General, the use of nicotine among teenagers can increase their chances of long-term harm to brain development, the possibility of addiction and it can affect their respiratory health.

With the harmful effects of tobacco use and through the annual report, the ALA is hoping to create awareness so lawmakers can make necessary changes.

One recent change in Florida was the approval of Amendment 9 in November, prohibiting vaping in enclosed indoor workplaces.

The ALA now wants the minimum age for the sale of tobacco products in Florida to be raised from 18 to 21.

Recently, Alachua County became the first county in Florida to do so.