Understanding the New Tobacco Epidemic for California: Flavored Tobacco Products

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The U.S. Surgeon General has declared electronic cigarette use among youth an “epidemic.” In 2018 for U.S. high schoolers, electronic cigarette use in the past month jumped by 80% in one year to a prevalence rate of 20.8%. Dr. Tong and Ms. Homer-Vagadori will discuss the epidemic in California from tobacco use trends to health and policy issues. In 2018 for California high schoolers, use of electronic cigarettes now exceeds other tobacco products. Among some California counties and school districts, current use of electronic cigarettes is reported as high as or higher than national rates. Flavored tobacco products are considered a key contributor to this epidemic, and are overwhelmingly used by California youth. Since 2016, California has one of the first “Tobacco 21” statewide laws restricting sales to 21 and over, but limitations of this law will also be discussed. California cities and counties have passed thirty-five local ordinances to date restricting the sale of flavored tobacco products.

Elisa Tong, MD, MA is an Associate Professor of Internal Medicine at University of California, Davis. Her research interests are in tobacco control policy and cessation, with special interests in disparities. Dr. Tong’s research on the tobacco industry’s efforts to subvert scientific conclusions on secondhand smoke won an American Legacy Foundation award. She has since led “UC Quits” to improve tobacco treatment across the 5 UC health systems and connect with the state quitline, the California Smokers’ Helpline. She is now the Project Director for “CA Quits,” which hosts statewide learning collaboratives on tobacco treatment for safety net providers, Medi-Cal managed care plans, and public health partners. Dr. Tong also has interests in addressing tobacco policy and cessation on college campuses, and serves on the UC systemwide Smoke and Tobacco-Free Policy steering committee.

Kimberlee Homer Vagadori, MPH is the Project Director for the California Youth Advocacy Network (CYAN). In tobacco control for 18 years, she is an expert on college tobacco-free policy, youth and young adult advocacy, and tobacco industry sponsorship issues and has successfully coordinated systemwide policy initiatives in California. Ms. Homer Vagadori also provides technical assistance and training to local, state, and national organizations on issues such as youth engagement in local advocacy, tobacco and the environment, emerging tobacco products, campus-based cessation services, and tobacco industry targeting of youth and young adults.

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