

Launched in 2018, the first ever Greater Cincinnati Adult Tobacco Survey is the most comprehensive source of local data for understanding adult tobacco use behaviors, attitudes and public opinion in our region.

## A barrier to racial and health equity in Greater Cincinnati

Despite progress, tobacco use remains the single most preventable cause of disease, disability and death in the United States—and Greater Cincinnati.<sup>1</sup> Left out of progress, certain groups continue to bear

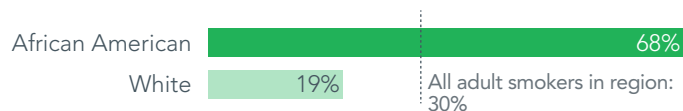
a disproportionate burden of tobacco-related harms.

Flavors entice youth to start and keep smoking cigarettes. The 2009 Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act prohibited the

use of flavors in cigarettes—except for menthol, a mint flavor.<sup>2</sup> Keeping menthol-flavored cigarettes on the market has led to tobacco-related disparities that are a major barrier to advancing racial and health equity in Greater Cincinnati.

## Who is smoking menthol cigarettes?

### PERCENTAGE OF ADULT SMOKERS WHO ARE CURRENT MENTHOL CIGARETTE USERS, BY RACE



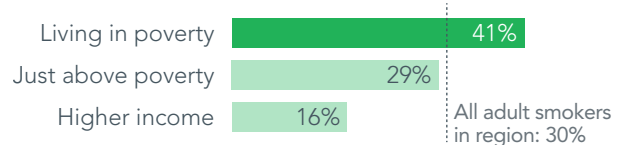
SOURCE: 2018 Greater Cincinnati Adult Tobacco Survey

### AFRICAN AMERICANS

The percentage of African American adults in Greater Cincinnati who report that they are current smokers is the same as white adults. However, **African Americans are more likely to die from smoking-related diseases**—such as heart disease, stroke and cancer—than people who are white.<sup>3</sup>

In Greater Cincinnati, 3 in 10 smokers (30%) usually smoke menthol cigarettes. However, **7 in 10 African American smokers** (68%) usually smoke menthol cigarettes.<sup>4</sup> That compares with just **2 in 10 white smokers** (19%).

### PERCENTAGE OF ADULT SMOKERS WHO ARE CURRENT MENTHOL CIGARETTE USERS, BY INCOME



SOURCE: 2018 Greater Cincinnati Adult Tobacco Survey

### ADULTS WITH LOWER INCOMES

Adults with lower incomes in Greater Cincinnati are **three times more likely to be current smokers** than adults with higher incomes. They also are more likely to suffer from smoking-related diseases than those with higher incomes.<sup>5</sup>

**As income increases, the use of menthol cigarettes declines dramatically.** While 16% of smokers with higher incomes usually smoke menthol cigarettes, 41% of those living in poverty and 29% of those living just above the federal poverty level smoke menthol cigarettes.<sup>6</sup>

**OTHER GROUPS** National data show that **young people** who smoke, **people who identify as LGBTQ** who smoke and **adults with mental health issues** who smoke are more likely to use menthol cigarettes.<sup>7</sup>

## What is driving use among these groups?



### TARGETED MARKETING BY TOBACCO INDUSTRY

Decades of well-documented, aggressive marketing by the tobacco industry resulted in greater popularity of menthol cigarettes, particularly among African Americans and youth.<sup>7,8</sup> The tobacco industry concentrated marketing in African American neighborhoods, sponsored community and music events and advertised in magazines popular among African Americans.<sup>7</sup> Using youthful images and topics in advertising appealed to youth and new smokers and encouraged them to start and continue smoking menthol cigarettes.<sup>9</sup>



### LEGAL EXEMPTIONS FOR MENTHOL

Some tobacco control policies, such as the 2009 Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act, make exemptions for menthol-flavored cigarettes. By prioritizing tobacco industry interests, the policies do not protect all people.<sup>10</sup>



### FLAVOR MAKES TOBACCO SEEM LESS HARSH

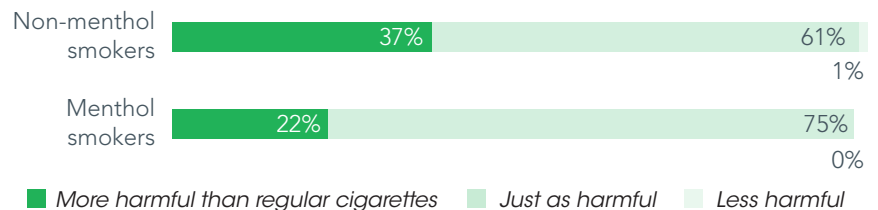
The tobacco industry adds menthol to cigarettes to make them seem less harsh and more palatable.<sup>7,10</sup> Almost all cigarettes contain some menthol. Those that include menthol in greater quantities as a flavor component are marketed by the tobacco industry as “menthol cigarettes.” After learning from their own research that young people prefer smaller amounts of menthol compared with older adults, the tobacco industry lowered menthol in some brands to make them more appealing to youth.<sup>7,10</sup>

## What do adults think about menthol cigarettes?

### PERCEIVED HARM OF MENTHOL CIGARETTES

Overall, most Greater Cincinnati adults (94%) think that menthol-flavored cigarettes are more harmful or just as harmful as non-menthol cigarettes. However, non-menthol smokers (37%) are more likely than menthol smokers (22%) to think that menthol cigarettes are more harmful than non-menthol cigarettes.

### PERCEPTION OF THE HARM OF MENTHOL CIGARETTES BY MENTHOL AND NON-MENTHOL SMOKERS



SOURCE: 2018 Greater Cincinnati Adult Tobacco Survey

INTERACT FOR HEALTH

### WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT THE HARM OF MENTHOL CIGARETTES

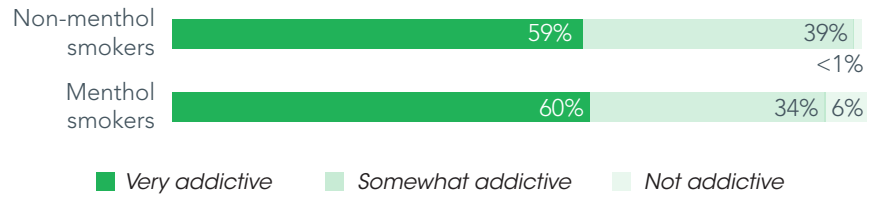
- Smoking is harmful. Tobacco smoke contains over 7,000 chemicals that are harmful to smokers and non-smokers.<sup>11</sup> These same chemicals—and the harm they cause—are found in menthol cigarettes.
- The tobacco industry has marketed menthol cigarettes as “healthier” with “medical benefits,” which led consumers to—falsely—believe that they were less harmful than regular cigarettes.<sup>12</sup>

# What do adults think about menthol cigarettes? (continued)

## PERCEIVED ADDICTIVENESS OF MENTHOL CIGARETTES

Overall, most Greater Cincinnati adults (96%) think that menthol cigarettes are very addictive or somewhat addictive. However, menthol smokers (6%) are more likely than non-menthol smokers (<1%) to think that menthol cigarettes are not at all addictive.

## PERCEPTION OF THE ADDICTIVENESS OF MENTHOL CIGARETTES BY MENTHOL AND NON-MENTHOL SMOKERS



SOURCE: 2018 Greater Cincinnati Adult Tobacco Survey

## WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT THE ADDICTIVENESS OF MENTHOL CIGARETTES

- Smoking is highly addictive. Menthol cigarettes are as addictive—if not more addictive—as non-menthol cigarettes.<sup>13</sup>
- Research shows that menthol smokers—and African American smokers in particular—are less likely to successfully quit than non-menthol smokers.<sup>14</sup>

## What if the sale of menthol cigarettes was prohibited?

Menthol is the only flavor still legally permitted in regular cigarettes. Emerging research indicates that laws restricting the sale of menthol cigarettes—when properly enforced—will increase cessation, reduce addiction and decrease youth initiation and access.<sup>15</sup>

Countering the tobacco industry’s history of targeted marketing to specific populations, **a menthol restriction is a promising racial and health equity policy solution** that has the potential to reduce tobacco-related disparities. More than 100 local jurisdictions across the U.S. and two states have passed a menthol cigarette restriction—though **none of those communities are in Greater Cincinnati**.<sup>16</sup>

Restricting the sale of menthol cigarettes is part of a comprehensive policy approach to restrict the sale of all flavored tobacco products, including flavored cigars, little cigars, smokeless tobacco, hookah and e-cigarettes and menthol cigarettes. Comprehensive flavor policies do not include exemptions for certain products or retailers and include strong enforcement.<sup>17</sup>

## IF A LAW PROHIBITED THE SALE OF MENTHOL CIGARETTES, MENTHOL CIGARETTE SMOKERS IN GREATER CINCINNATI WOULD BE MOST LIKELY TO:

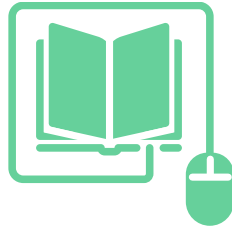


# Local strategies to address menthol cigarettes

Most Greater Cincinnati adults (64%) think that smoking is a problem in their community. Here are some local strategies we know work:

## EDUCATION

Educate the public about the history, harm and role of menthol cigarettes in perpetuating tobacco-related disparities—and why it's a racial and health equity issue.



## COUNTERMARKETING

Counter the tobacco industry's targeted marketing of menthol cigarettes to certain groups of people.



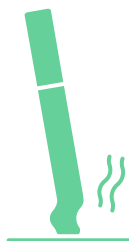
## POLICY CHANGES

Enact tobacco control policies that prohibit the sale of all flavors—including menthol—in tobacco products.



## CESSATION RESOURCES

Provide culturally appropriate cessation resources tailored to menthol smokers who want to quit.



# Quit Culture

Quit Culture is a community-driven movement that wants to change the culture around smoking in Greater Cincinnati's Black communities. Learn more at [quitculture.com](https://quitculture.com).

# NOTES

- 1 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Office of the Surgeon General. (2014). The health consequences of smoking—50 years of progress: A report of the surgeon general, 2014. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3aShvwL>
- 2 U.S. Food and Drug Administration. (2018). Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act – An overview. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3aShOrp>
- 3 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2018). African Americans and tobacco use. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2Ze3owt>
- 4 These data are in line with national data on African American menthol cigarette use. However, the number of African American menthol cigarette smokers who responded to the survey is 75 so additional caution should be taken when interpreting the findings because of the potential large variation.
- 5 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2019). Cigarette smoking and tobacco use among people of low socioeconomic status. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/3a5WSxG>
- 6 In 2017, a family of four living in poverty (the equivalent of 100% or less of the Federal Poverty Guidelines) had a household income of \$24,600 or less. A family of four living just above the poverty level (between 100% and 200% FPG) had a household income between \$24,601 and \$49,200. A family of four that had higher income (more than 200% FPG) had a household income greater than \$49,200.
- 7 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020). Menthol and cigarettes. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/2ZoDZQt>
- 8 Stanford University. (2020). Research into the Impact of Tobacco Advertising, Cigarette Advertising Themes, African Americans. Retrieved from: <https://stanford.io/2N8fEfn>
- 9 Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. (2021). Impact of menthol cigarettes on youth smoking initiation and health disparities. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/3aLq9NC>
- 10 Center for Tobacco Products of the Food and Drug Administration, Tobacco Products Scientific Advisory Committee. (2011). Menthol cigarettes and public health: Review of the scientific evidence and recommendations. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/3rANJmJ>
- 11 National Institutes of Health, National Cancer Institute. (2017). Harms of cigarette smoking and health benefits of quitting. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/3aUNKLU>
- 12 Keller, P. A., D'Silva, J., Lien, R. K., Boyle, R. G., Kingsbury, J., & O'Gara, E. (2020). Perceived harm of menthol cigarettes and quitting behaviors among menthol smokers in Minnesota. Preventive medicine reports, 20, 101269. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/3a2sLXX>
- 13 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, National Cancer Institute. (2015). Know more about menthol cigarettes. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/3p24c1H>
- 14 U.S. Food and Drug Administration. (2020). Menthol and other flavors in tobacco products. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/2Z3NeFu>
- 15 Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. (2021). Flavored tobacco sales restrictions: Promising evidence for reducing youth access and tobacco use. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/3a0k1BL>
- 16 Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. (2021). States and localities that have restricted the sale of flavored tobacco products. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/2QdzLsC>
- 17 Public Health Law Center. (Accessed 2021). Menthol and other flavored products. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/3jvMra2>

The 2018 Greater Cincinnati Adult Tobacco Survey is sponsored by Interact for Health. GCATS was conducted Aug. 11, 2018-Jan. 31, 2019, by the Institute for Policy Research at the University of Cincinnati. A random sample of 2,300 adults from a 22-county region surrounding Cincinnati was interviewed by telephone. This included 847 landline telephone interviews and 1,453 cell phone interviews. In 95 out of 100 cases, estimates will be accurate to ±2.0%. There are other sources of variation inherent in public opinion studies, such as non-response, question wording or context effects that can introduce error or bias. For more information about the Greater Cincinnati Adult Tobacco Survey, please visit [www.interactforhealth.org/about-tobacco-survey/](http://www.interactforhealth.org/about-tobacco-survey/).