

Historically Black Colleges and Universities Partner on Tobacco-Free Campus Initiative

N.C. Chronic Disease and Injury Section 2016

Summary

Thanks to a collaborative initiative led by Former U.S. Surgeon General Regina Benjamin, M.D., and coordinated by the Truth Initiative, 42 Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), including five in North Carolina, are working toward tobacco-free campus policies. The NC Tobacco Prevention and Control Branch (TPCB) provides tailored resources and technical assistance for North Carolina's HBCUs on tobacco-free policy and helping people quit tobacco use for good. In addition, the TPCB provides leadership on the national steering committee for the initiative.

Challenge

Smoking tobacco products like cigarettes and cigars kills African Americans at a higher rate than it does tobacco users in the general population. Although a lower percentage of African Americans smoke than whites, and although blacks tend to smoke fewer cigarettes per day, African Americans who smoke are more likely to develop life-threatening illnesses than whites who smoke, and are more likely to die from those diseases. Tobacco use kills 47,300 African-Americans each year, which is a death rate higher than that of the general population.

N.C. has more historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) than any other state. HBCUs serve mostly low-income communities, where tobacco products are heavily advertised and there are higher smoking rates. HBCUs are also less likely to have a 100 percent tobacco-free campus policy than predominantly white institutions.

Solution

The Guide to Community Preventive Services states that tobacco-free policies can help improve health and save lives. Truth Initiative supports HBCUs in creating tobacco-free campus policies by providing annual grants and ongoing technical assistance to selected campuses. The HBCU Initiative focuses on task force building that consists of diverse campus and community stakeholders. This community engagement assists with assessing existing policies and programs, planning student-led education and activism, and identifying resources to help people quit tobacco use. Education on why and how tobacco use and marketing are social justice issues help lead to development, adoption, and implementation of tobacco-free policies. The TPCB is a strong partner on the HBCU Initiative and provides connections to both state and local resources such as model policy language, QuitlineNC promotion and partnership relations.

Results

The intended outcomes of the national program are to: 1) Reduce secondhand smoke exposure; 2) Educate and increase awareness of menthol tobacco and other harmful emerging products on HBCU campuses; 3) Have 40 HBCUs adopt comprehensive tobacco-free campus policies by December 2017. To date, five HBCUs in North Carolina have received Tobacco-Free HBCU Campus grants from Truth Initiative and several are well on their way to policy change. The funded HBCUs include North Carolina A&T State University, North Carolina Central University, Shaw University, St. Augustine's University and Winston-Salem State University.



Image to promote Black History Month on HBCU campuses.

Sustaining Success

In order to create social change on HBCU campuses, organizations must foster the power of student leadership and empower their ability to seek change in their communities. Other institutions can implement this model to enact community level change. Core Elements for each campus that have the potential for sustainability include:

- Developing a tobacco-free campus task force;
- Assessing attitudes regarding tobacco use;
- Conducting education and awareness campaigns on their campuses;
- Identifying culturally appropriate services to help people quit tobacco use; and
- Developing a comprehensive tobacco-free policy.

Get Involved

Truth Initiative wants to support even more HBCUs to create healthier campuses and communities. Interested campuses should contact Denise Smith, HBCU Manager at Truth Initiative at dsmith@truthinitiative.org. Those interested can also get involved by attending the “Together We Can: Tobacco-Free HBCU Summit” On April 8, 2016.

The Tobacco Prevention and Control Branch is partnering with the American Cancer Society-Cancer Action Network to host this highly exciting and inspiring one day discussion and networking opportunity for North Carolina HBCU students and leaders to come together and learn more about the Initiative and what they can do to take action. For more information on the HBCU Summit, visit <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/HBCUSummit>.



Student Dmetrius Jones poses with Shaw University's tobacco-free campus sign.

“For decades, tobacco messaging and media has targeted minority communities, particularly African Americans, with intense advertising and promotional efforts. As a result of this investment, African Americans suffer the greatest burden of tobacco-related mortality of any ethnic or racial group in the U.S.” Cornell P. Wright, MPA, Executive Director, Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities

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