

Widespread support for raising minimum age for buying tobacco, survey finds

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Consumers have already seen two states raise the legal age for buying tobacco products this year; Hawaii became the first state to raise the age limit to 21 in January, and California followed suit shortly after that. Now, a new survey shows that consumers in other states wouldn't mind seeing similar changes.



The survey, which was conducted by researchers from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and East Carolina University, shows that a majority of adults are in favor of increasing the legal age for purchasing tobacco products. These findings represented consumers from all nine regions of the U.S., from both sides of the political spectrum, and for both smokers and non-smokers.

“What we found was really an overall trend of broad support for this policy,” said Dr. Adam O. Goldstein, a professor in the UNC School of Medicine Department of Family Medicine.

Widespread support

The study used 4,880 adults who were aged 18 years or older from across the U.S. Participants were asked if they supported raising the minimum age for buying tobacco products; if so, they were asked if 19, 20, 21 was the appropriate age.

In all regions of the country, participants were in favor of raising the minimum age for buying tobacco products. The level of support ranged from 59.6% in seven states in the Midwestern region to 73.1% for four states in the Southern region. In terms of the appropriate age, most respondents said that 21 would be the best age to change the policy to.

The researchers point out that even regions that have historic connections to the tobacco industry were in favor of the change.

“Even in regions with historically strong ties to tobacco growing and manufacturing, a strong majority of the public, including smokers, is in favor of raising the minimum legal age of tobacco sales,” said Dr. Joseph G. L. Lee.

Increased health benefits

Experts believe that raising the smoking age to 21 could have a huge impact on consumer health. The researchers quote a 2015 National Academy of Medicine report that states that healthcare costs would likely plunge as a result and that smoking prevalence would decrease by 12% nationally.

“By restricting tobacco use to people 21 and older, the compelling evidence is that you have less people who end up using it. They don't end up taking up smoking and tobacco. And if you cut down on adolescents using tobacco, you'll ultimately cut down on how many adults use tobacco, and then you cut down on tobacco-related diseases like heart disease and cancer,” said Goldstein.

The researchers also point out that the widespread support of this policy change might make it easier for politicians to get behind it.

“With these findings, policy makers and public health advocates can move forward knowing that people in their states support raising the minimum legal age for selling tobacco products, and that this is an issue that is not viewed as partisan,” said Goldstein. “It seems to cross political lines, and it is one policy measure that the majority of those surveyed can agree on.”

Catalyst for change

The researchers hope that their work may act as a catalyst for raising the legal age for buying tobacco products across the country. They point out that the strength of their data is something that cannot be ignored.

“With the strong support indicated in our data, I think we will continue to see strong momentum. It appears likely that increasingly, lawmakers are going to be interested in doing this,” said Goldstein.

The [full study](#) has been published in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*.