

## Raise smoking age to 21 to save lives

The Legislature should ban people under the age of 21 from buying and possessing tobacco products.

TOBACCO addiction is the leading cause of preventable deaths in Washington, causing about 8,300 residents to die each year. Annual health costs now surpass \$2.8 billion.

The best way to combat this crisis is to raise the legal smoking age to 21, as the Legislature is considering with SHB 1458. Attorney General Bob Ferguson requested the bill, and science supports his efforts.

A new Institute of Medicine of the National Academies study found that 90 percent of smokers report using cigarettes before the age of 19. Preventing cigarette use at least until the age of 21 is most effective in stopping young adults from developing a long-term, damaging habit.

Several schools and local jurisdictions, including New York City, that have raised the legal age to 21 have been able to cut youth smoking rates by as much as 50 percent.

This change would help greatly reduce the risk of countless people needlessly suffering from heart disease, cancer and strokes, among other problems.

The adolescent brain is especially vulnerable to the effects of nicotine. Teens will always find a way to rebel and experiment with these vices, but that does not alleviate the need for state officials to solve a major public-health crisis.

Washington already bans alcohol and marijuana use until the age of 21. Extend that rule to tobacco products, including cigarettes and e-cigarettes.

SHB 1458 recently passed the state House Health Care and Wellness Committee by a vote of 12-3. It's now in the House Finance Committee.

This Legislature should approve this measure to save lives.

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