

# Raising the smoking age to 21 will save lives: Letters

## Raising the smoking age in California will save lives

Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable deaths in the United States. Over the past several years, there have been a number of efforts at encouraging smoking cessation, yet nearly 500,000 people die each year of tobacco-related deaths.

Data shows that more than 90 percent of smokers begin smoking prior to the age of 21. The Phillip Morris Company report of January 21, 1986, said "Raising the legal minimum age for cigarette purchaser to 21 could gut our key young adult market (17-20) where we sell about 25 billion cigarettes and enjoy a 70 percent market share."

Nearly 30 years ago, the Phillip Morris Company understood their target population, as we do now.

The prefrontal cortex is the part of the brain responsible for executive functions. It controls decision-making, peer pressure susceptibility and sensation-seeking impulses.

The prefrontal cortex does not fully develop until after the age of 25, thus crippling adolescents from making sound decisions about their health now and in the future. This helps explain why the majority of smoking behavior begins prior to young adulthood.

State Sen. Ed Hernandez's (D-Azusa) efforts to raise the legal smoking age in California from 18 to 21 will save lives by limiting adolescent and young adult access to tobacco products and should be supported.

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