

# Our view: Duluth, state can follow Edina's lead on tobacco

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Duluth, of course, can reclaim its leadership position by becoming the second city to take such action.

Better yet, though, the Minnesota Legislature can beat Duluth in making the sensible move of raising the age statewide.

Legislative action would reduce the number of young Minnesotans who take up the habit by 25 percent, according to a study commissioned by ClearWay Minnesota and the Minnesota Department of Health. The study was published in the January/February issue of *Minnesota Medicine*, a publication of the Minnesota Medical Association, giving lawmakers plenty of fuel for action.

"That's 30,000 Minnesota kids over the next 15 years who will not become addicted. That would be impressive," ClearWay's Anne Mason said in an interview this week with the News Tribune Opinion page. "It takes it out of a high school kid's social circle. ... If (tobacco companies) don't get to you before age 21, chances are you won't become an addicted adult."

An estimated 95 percent of adults who smoke or use tobacco started before they were 21, according to ClearWay, the Minneapolis-based, nonprofit smoking-cessation group. Once hooked, smokers and other tobacco users face the likelihood of lung cancer, throat cancer, and other deadly ailments. An estimated 5,100 to 5,500 Minnesotans die every year from smoking. The habit accounts for one in five U.S. deaths annually. Tobacco kills more people every year than alcohol, murders, car crashes, AIDS, illegal drugs and suicides — combined, according to ClearWay.

And smokers and other tobacco users aren't the only ones who pay a price. A 2013 estimate found that Minnesotans dole out \$3 billion a year to cover excess health-care costs related to smoking. That comes to \$554 from every man, woman and child in the state.

Minnesota was the first state to respond with the 1975 Clean Indoor Air Act. The state's Freedom to Breathe Act followed in 2007, banning smoking in all public places, including even restaurants, bars and bowling alleys. More recently, lawmaker jacked up the state's tobacco tax in an attempt to make tobacco unaffordable, reducing its use, especially among young people.

Closer to home, Duluth was the first city in Minnesota to ban smoking at bus shelters. In 2010, the City Council passed a smoking-disclosure law that requires landlords to tell prospective tenants their policies on smoking. In 2012, the city banned smoking in public parks, including on the Lakewalk. And a year later, Duluth became the first city in Minnesota to ban e-cigarettes indoors where tobacco use already was forbidden.

"Duluth very much, historically, has been a leader in this," Mason said. "But we definitely support Edina taking this latest action. We've heard rumors of other cities following suit. We hear other cities are interested."

Those other cities can include Duluth. We can join the more than 220 cities in 16 states that already have raised the legal age for tobacco purchases to 21.

Or, better yet, the state of Minnesota can join Hawaii and California in making the change statewide, in the name of better health.