

# Smoking & the LGBT Community

## In Summary

The American Cancer Society reports that “each year about 438,000 people in the United States die from illnesses related to smoking. Cigarettes kill more Americans than alcohol, car accidents, suicide, AIDS, homicide, and illegal drugs combined.”

The lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community in the United States continues to be disproportionately impacted by smoking. The LGBT community is among the populations most severely impacted by tobacco use. The most recent study suggests the LGBT community smokes at a rate almost 50% to 200% higher than the general population. This is in part due to Tobacco Companies that aggressively advertise to the LGBT Community. The social stress of living in a society that can be hostile to LGBT people, also plays a factor in higher smoking rates, particularly among LGBT youth.

Smoking cessation is an important component of LGBT health and wellness. Residents of the District of Columbia can access free support to quit smoking by calling 1-800-QUIT-NOW. DC residents who call this number can get free smoking cessation aids like nicotine gum or patches.

## The LGBT Community is Disproportionately Impacted by Tobacco

- Members of the LGBT community smoke at a far greater rate than that of the general population, although estimates vary widely. In one 2004 California Study, lesbian women were 70% more likely to smoke than other women, and gay men were more than 50% more likely to smoke than other men. More recent research suggests this number may be even higher. The LGBT National Tobacco Control Network estimates that the LGBT community is 50% to 200% more likely than others to be addicted to tobacco.<sup>1,2</sup>
- LGBT adolescents also smoke at an alarming rate, in one national study 47 of females and 36.7 of males reporting same-sex attraction or behavior smoked. In comparison, only 29% of the rest of young people in the study smoked.<sup>3</sup>

## Negative Health Impacts of Smoking are Clear

- Tobacco is the number one cause of mortality in this country.<sup>4</sup> The American Cancer Society estimates that over 30,000 LGBT people die each year of tobacco-related diseases.<sup>5</sup> This is a conservative estimate, because it presumes we smoke at the same rate as the rest of the population.
- Adults who smoke lose an average of 13 to 14 years of their lives.<sup>6</sup>
- In the United States, about 90% of lung cancer deaths in men and almost 80% of lung cancer deaths in women are due to smoking.<sup>7</sup>
- Smoking causes coronary heart disease, the leading cause of death in the United States. Cigarette smokers are 2–4 times more likely to develop coronary heart disease than nonsmokers.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Tang H, Greenwood GL, Cowling, DW, Lloyd, JC, Roeseler AG, Bal, DG. “Cigarette Smoking among lesbians, gays, and bisexuals: how serious a problem?” (2004) *Cancer Causes and Control*. Vol. 15, Number 8. Pages 797-803.

<sup>2</sup> National LGBT Tobacco Control Network. <http://lgbttobacco.org>. Accessed October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Easton A, Jackson, K, Mowery P, Comeau D, Sell R. (2008) Adolescent Same-Sex and Both-Sex Romantic Attractions and Relationships, Implications for Smoking. *Am J Public Health*. 2008;98 462-497.

<sup>4</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Annual Smoking-Attributable Mortality, Years of Potential Life Lost, and Economic Costs-U.S., 1995-1999. *MMWR Morbidity & Mortality Weekly Report*. April 2002;51(14).

<sup>5</sup> American Cancer Society. Tobacco and the LGBT Community. <http://www.LGBThealth.org/documents/LGBTtobacco.pdf>. Accessed October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> 2004 Surgeon General's Report. The Health Consequences of Smoking. Office of the Surgeon General.

<sup>7</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Lung Cancer Risk Factors. [http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/lung/basic\\_info/risk\\_factors.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/lung/basic_info/risk_factors.htm). Accessed October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

## Smoking and HIV/AIDS

- Smoking weakens the immune system, and makes it even harder to fight off opportunistic infections associated with HIV. Smoking also increases the risk of HIV-associated malignancies and other cancers found among people living with HIV/AIDS. Further, HIV positive individuals who are at greater risk for heart disease because of lipodystrophy, significantly compound that risk by smoking.<sup>9</sup>

## Tobacco Companies Have Targeted our Community

- The tobacco industry spends more than \$13 billion each year to promote cigarette use in the United States.<sup>10</sup> The Tobacco company has targeted the LGBT community since at least 1991, advertising at Pride and other LGBT community events, and contributing to both national and local LGBT and HIV/AIDS Organizations.<sup>11</sup> Some HIV/AIDS organizations in DC continue to accept tobacco money.
- An early Tobacco industry document described the plan for increasing sales among San Francisco's gay and homeless populations, it was labeled "Project SCUM".<sup>12</sup>

## Social Stress Factors also Contribute to Increased Smoking Rates.

- The stress of living in a society that can sometimes be hostile to the LGBT community creates social stress that makes many LGBT people, but particularly LGBT youth, at greater risk for substance use.<sup>13</sup>
- 30% of gay, lesbian, and bisexual high school students in the District of Columbia said they were bullied at least once on school property in the 2006-2007 school year. More than a quarter of GLB high school students said they had skipped school once or more in the past month because they felt unsafe in school or on the way to school.<sup>14</sup> Social stress factors such as these contribute to greater smoking rates.

## LGBT People and Smoking Cessation

- Although more lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender smokers believe smoking increases their risk of diseases such as lung cancer and heart disease, fewer have made quit attempts (75% compared with 80% of all adults).<sup>15</sup>
- Residents of the District of Columbia can access free support to quit smoking by calling 1-800-QUIT-NOW. DC residents who call this number can get free smoking cessation aids like nicotine gum or patches.
- The DC Center offers smoking cessation support for all LGBT people and allies which comes with nicotine replacement therapy. Combining nicotine replacement therapy with such a program will double your chances of quitting successfully.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Heart Disease and Stroke. [http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/health\\_effects/heart\\_disease/](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/health_effects/heart_disease/). Accessed October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

<sup>9</sup> For additional information, please see The DC Center Fact Sheet entitled "Smoking and HIV/AIDS"

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC), Cigarette Report for 2004 and 2005, 2007 [data for top 5 manufacturers], <http://www.ftc.gov/reports/tobacco/2007cigarette2004-2005.pdf>. FTC, Smokeless Tobacco Report for the Years 2002 and 2005, 2007, <http://www.ftc.gov/reports/tobacco/02-05smokeless0623105.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Smith E, Malone R. (2003) The Outing of Philip Morris: Advertising Tobacco to Gay Men. *Am J Public Health*. 2003 June; 93(6): 988-993.

<sup>12</sup> American Legacy Foundation. Project Scum. <http://www.americanlegacy.org/2114.aspx>. Accessed October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

<sup>13</sup> Savin-Williams R. Verbal and physical abuse stressors in the lives of lesbian, gay male, and bisexual youths: associations with school problems, running away, substance abuse, prostitution, and suicide. *J Consult Clin Psychol*. 1994;62:261-269.

<sup>14</sup> DC Public Schools. 2007 DC Youth Risk Behavior Survey. [http://www.k12.dc.us/offices/oss/hiv aids/pdfs/LGBT\\_fact\\_sheet.pdf](http://www.k12.dc.us/offices/oss/hiv aids/pdfs/LGBT_fact_sheet.pdf). Accessed October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

<sup>15</sup> Harris Interactive: Gays and Lesbians More Likely to Smoke than Other Adults Despite Risks. <http://www.harrisinteractive.com/news/allnewsbydate.asp?NewsID=289>. Accessed October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

<sup>16</sup> American Cancer Society. Guide to quitting smoking.

[http://www.cancer.org/docroot/PED/content/PED\\_10\\_13X\\_Guide\\_for\\_Quitting\\_Smoking.asp?sitearea=&level=](http://www.cancer.org/docroot/PED/content/PED_10_13X_Guide_for_Quitting_Smoking.asp?sitearea=&level=). Accessed October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2008.