



Capital District
Tobacco-Free
Communities



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New statewide “It’s Not Just” campaign aimed at exposing the targeted marketing of menthol cigarettes to Black communities

Capital District Tobacco-Free Communities invites local organizations and residents to take action to promote racial justice and health equity

ALBANY, N.Y. – Capital District Tobacco-Free Communities, in collaboration with its statewide tobacco control partners, is launching a new statewide initiative that aims to put a spotlight on how the tobacco industry has aggressively marketed menthol products to African Americans.^{1,2} The “It’s Not Just” campaign launches regionally and statewide on No Menthol Sunday, May 16, and is focused on ending the misconception that menthol is just a flavor. It’s not just a flavor but an injustice that is disproportionately killing Black Americans.

Smoking-related illnesses are the No. 1 cause of death in the African American community, surpassing all other causes of death, including AIDS, homicide, diabetes and accidents.^{3,4,5} Since the 1960s, the tobacco industry was developing deliberate strategies to increase menthol product appeal to the African American community. This targeting has resulted in 85% of African American smokers using menthol cigarettes, compared to 29% of white smokers.^{3,6} Menthol cigarettes are more addictive and harder to quit, which explains why Black smokers are less successful at quitting even though they try to quit more often than white smokers.⁷

“Our local tobacco retailer observation data shows that menthol cigarettes are more heavily marketed and less expensive in predominantly Black neighborhoods throughout the Capital Region,” said Judy Rightmyer, Director, Capital District Tobacco-Free Communities. **“It’s not by accident and it’s not just.”**

“With the recent FDA announcement to ban menthol, this campaign couldn’t be more timely and relevant,” said LaTroya Hester, director of communications, The Center for Black Health & Equity. **“We know that the tobacco industry will fight this decision with the full force of its legal and marketing power, but we’re not intimidated. The Center is excited about the launch of this campaign, and we are so honored to contribute to much-needed counter messaging.”**

When New York State ended the sale of flavored e-cigarettes statewide in May 2020, it was a significant step toward reducing youth tobacco use. However, flavored tobacco products that remain on the market, including menthol cigarettes and flavored cigars and cigarillos, continue to attract young users and are disproportionately smoked by Black youth and adults. In 2019, Albany County proposed to end the sale of all flavored tobacco products including menthol cigarettes, but the bill narrowly failed to pass. Numerous community members and organizations, including the Albany NAACP, spoke out in support of the bill.

“For decades, the tobacco industry has been targeting African Americans and have contributed to the skyrocketing rates of heart disease, stroke and cancer across our community. The tobacco industry is on a narrow quest for profit, and they have been killing us along the way,” said Debora Brown-Johnson, President, Albany NAACP. **“The NAACP has been calling for a ban on menthol cigarettes and cigars for years now, and we applaud the FDA’s latest plan to do just that. It’s about time we prioritize the health and well-being of African Americans.”**

Individuals can learn more about how to help fight the injustice of menthol at the new campaign’s website www.notjustmenthol.org.

About Capital District Tobacco-Free Communities Capital District Tobacco-Free Communities (CDTFC) is a NYS Bureau of Tobacco Control grant funded program held by St. Peter’s Health Partners. CDTFC works to increase support for New York State’s tobacco-free norm through youth action and community engagement. Efforts are evidence-based, policy-driven, and cost-effective approaches that decrease youth tobacco use, motivate adult smokers to quit, and eliminate exposure to secondhand smoke. Visit www.smokefreecapital.org for more information.

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 4. American Cancer Society, “Cancer Facts & Figures for African Americans, 2013–2014,” 2013, <http://www.cancer.org/acs/groups/content/@epidemiologysurveillance/documents/document/acspc-036921.pdf>.
 5. American Heart Association, “African Americans and Cardiovascular Diseases: Statistical Fact Sheet, 2012 Update,” http://www.heart.org/idc/groups/heartpublic/@wcm/@sop/@smd/documents/downloadable/ucm_319568.pdf
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 7. Tobacco Products Scientific Advisory Committee’s Report and Recommendations on the Impact of the Use of Menthol in Cigarettes on the Public Health. 2011.

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