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## **HHS Smoking Cessation Framework Marks Important Step in Mitigating Tobacco-Related Disease and Health Disparities**

*Statement of Kathy Crosby, President and CEO, Truth Initiative*

**WASHINGTON, D.C. (March 11, 2024)** – The smoking cessation framework released by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) signifies an important step in advancing smoking cessation efforts and mitigating tobacco-related health disparities nationwide. Smoking remains the country's number one preventable cause of death and disease, resulting in more than 480,000 deaths each year and costing more than \$240 billion annually in health care spending.

The long-awaited plan will help Americans from all walks of life quit smoking through evidence-based programs. Digital programs, in particular, have a central role to play in reducing smoking prevalence nationwide. Interactive, individually tailored internet and text message programs are recommended by the U.S. Surgeon General based on strong evidence of their effectiveness. These kinds of programs are uniquely scalable and accessible to smokers in ways that other population-based approaches cannot support. Proven behavior change strategies and powerful social support through online social networks can be used as long as needed to achieve lifetime abstinence. Developed with Mayo Clinic, Truth Initiative's digital tobacco cessation program called EX is one such program that has helped millions of Americans build the skills and confidence needed to quit smoking, vaping, or using any commercial tobacco product.

Notably, the framework highlights the burden menthol cigarettes have on contributing to racial health disparities in Black communities and other communities, which have long been targeted by the tobacco industry. While Truth Initiative applauds the plan's efforts to reduce tobacco and cessation related disparities, that cannot be achieved without finalizing the proposed rules to remove menthol as a characterizing flavor in cigarettes and eliminate all characterizing flavors from cigars. We call once again for the Biden Administration to swiftly finalize and implement those rules.

Achieving President Biden's ambitious Cancer Moonshot goal to cut cancer death rates in half over the next 25 years requires that the Administration bring all resources to bear. The smoking cessation framework is a good first step. Enacting the menthol and flavored cigar rules would be a huge leap forward for eradicating the devastating toll of smoking-related death and disease.



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Truth Initiative is proud to be working with HHS as it moves the nation in the right direction toward comprehensive and accessible programs and tools that help Americans break free of tobacco use. We look forward to a future when youth reject tobacco use and anyone can quit.

**About Truth Initiative®**

Truth Initiative is a national public health organization dedicated to achieving a culture where all young people reject smoking and vaping, and anyone can quit. Our impact has helped drive youth smoking prevalence down from 23% in 2000 to a historic low of 2% in 2023. Through our proven-effective and nationally recognized **truth**® public education campaign and market leading cessation programs, we are leading the fight as e-cigarette use threatens to put a new generation at risk of nicotine addiction. Our first-of-its-kind, text message quit vaping program *This Is Quitting* has enrolled over 700,000 young people nationwide and our youth e-cigarette prevention curriculum *Vaping: Know the truth*® is being used in more than 9,000 schools nationwide. Our rigorous scientific research and policy studies, community and youth engagement programs supporting populations at high risk of using tobacco, and innovation in tobacco dependence treatment continue to help end one of the most critical public health battles of our time. Based in Washington D.C., our organization was established and funded through the 1998 Master Settlement Agreement between attorneys general from 46 states, five U.S. territories and the tobacco industry. To learn more, visit [truthinitiative.org](https://truthinitiative.org).

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