

Tobacco Marketing and Use in the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Community



- Research from the American Cancer Society shows that tobacco use kills at least 30,000 LGBT people each year in the United States.
- LGBT youth, who often feel like outsiders by virtue of their sexual preferences, choose to smoke at a higher rate than non-LGBT youth. The *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* reported that 59 percent of LGBT youth use tobacco, while only 35 percent of non-LGBT youth use tobacco.
- The *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* also reports that factors such as frequent patronage of clubs and bars, higher levels of social stress and advertising aimed directly at the LGBT community leads to higher rates of tobacco use among the LGBT community.
- In addition, tobacco companies provide financial support to LGBT festivals, bars, media and local organizations. Many times, that financial support comes with the condition that anti-tobacco materials be prohibited.
- The American Lung Association reports that the most infamous example of tobacco marketing targeted toward the LGBT community was “Project SCUM,” a plan by RJ Reynolds to market Red Camel cigarettes in San Francisco. SCUM stood for “subculture urban marketing” and the campaign targeted gay men in the city’s Castro District as well as homeless people.
- A Harris Interactive poll found that 36 percent of respondents who identified themselves as being in the LGBT community were smokers, while only 25 percent of self-identified heterosexuals were smokers.
- Gay men and lesbians have between 1.1 and 2.4 times the odds of smoking compared to heterosexual men and women, as reported by the American Lung Association. In addition, the American Lung Association reports that bisexual men and women have smoking rates that range from 30 percent to 39.1 percent, depending on the state in which they live.
- Smoking has been shown to accelerate the onset of AIDS among people with HIV, while HIV accelerates smoking-induced emphysema, according to the American Cancer Society.
- And once members of the LGBT become ill from smoking, it’s harder for them to get quality medical care. The American Lung Association reports that 82 percent of the overall heterosexual population has health insurance coverage. Only 77 percent of the LGBT population has health insurance, and only 57 percent of the transgender population has health insurance.

