



August 31, 2018

The Honorable James Mattis
Secretary, U.S. Department of Defense
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Mattis:

On behalf of the 131,400 members of the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP), I write to urge your support to raise the minimum tobacco purchase age at military facilities.

The health risks associated with tobacco usage are clear. Cigarette smoking is the number one cause of preventable death. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, tobacco use is associated with nearly all (80%) lung cancers but impacts every bodily organ. It can negatively impact periodontal health, immune responsiveness, rheumatoid arthritis, and cardiovascular health.

The Department of Defense has long recognized that [tobacco use](#) undermines military readiness and has encouraged smoke-free policies, but has yet to address tobacco purchase age restrictions. The AAFP supports raising the legal age for the purchase of tobacco products from 18 to 21 years of age and requiring active enforcement of age-at-sale for tobacco purchases. The AAFP also supports requiring that all tobacco products be placed behind sales counters in retail stores. Further, the Academy strongly opposes the promotional distribution of free cigarettes and tobacco products, supports legislation designed to prohibit such distribution, and urges that such laws be strictly enforced.

Nearly half of all active duty military personnel smoke or use tobacco products, many of whom (38%) begin smoking after military enlistment. Military personnel are 50% more likely to smoke than the general public and 400% more likely to use smokeless tobacco. Twenty-one states have raised the minimum tobacco purchase age to 21 to discourage smoking. The Institute of Medicine indicates that a nationwide "tobacco 21" policy could result in a 25% drop in youth smoking initiation and could save 4.2 million lives.

We welcome the opportunity to work with you on this effort. For more information, please contact Sonya Clay, Government Relations Representative, at 202-232-9033 or sclay@aafp.org.

Sincerely,

John Meigs, Jr., MD, FAAFP
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