

The Use of Snus as a Harm Reduction Product

A position statement demonstrating the harmful impact of SNUS on low SES populations

Introduction:

The National Network on Tobacco Prevention and Poverty (NNTPP) is one of six national networks funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Office on Smoking and Health (OSH). The mission of the NNTPP is to reduce the burden of tobacco use in low socioeconomic status (SES) communities. The NNTPP is composed of national organizations serving low SES populations. This Position Statement was developed as a result of a joint effort to provide states and other organizations to facilitate communication on the issue of Snus.

Background Information on Snus:

Several U.S. tobacco companies are now promoting the use of a form of tobacco known as *snus*. This form of tobacco traces its origins to Sweden, which is the only country in the European Union where its use is legal. Snus is a version of moist smokeless tobacco that is manufactured in small teabag-like pouches and placed in the mouth.

The manufacturers of domestic snus are optimistic that some people will view it as a relatively safe substitute for cigarettes—or as a means of maintaining the body’s demand for nicotine in circumstances where one cannot smoke, or prefers not to smoke. It is well known that some people do opt for spit tobacco products in those situations. In the case of snus, it is designed in such a way that its users do not need to spit, which could make the product more attractive to women.

NNTPP Position on the Use of Snus:

The National Network on Tobacco Prevention and Poverty (NNTPP) recognizes that there is no safe form of tobacco. Hence, it strongly opposes the promotion and adoption of any initiative asserting that any form of tobacco is an acceptable substitute for conventional cigarettes, cigars, pipe, or spit tobacco. The NNTPP finds that advocating “harm reduction” is neither an acceptable nor ethical public health practice. “Harm reduction” is the notion that use of a less deadly form of tobacco is acceptable for adults and children.

Public health concerns include the following:

- Snus will be viewed as a safe alternative to smoking.
- Snus is potentially a gateway to cigarette smoking.
- Some smokers will use snus when they cannot smoke, and thus become addicted to an additional tobacco product with known oral and gastrointestinal health risks.

- Some smokers will use snus as a means of smoking cessation, only to find that they are not able to quit snus use. Forty percent of Swedish snus users want to quit using them, but are unable to do so.
- All tobacco products are harmful to health and should not be promoted as a safe alternative to smoking.

While tobacco companies manufacturing snus and some researchers claim that considerable public health improvements can be attained by this alternative to smoking, the long-term health implications of snus use have not been established. Moreover, the tobacco industry has demonstrated that it cannot be trusted in matters of health. Millions of Americans were deceived into believing that filter cigarettes were not as harmful as unfiltered cigarettes. Then they were deceived into believing that “light” cigarettes were not as harmful as filter cigarettes. The National Cancer Institute (NCI) found in its 2001 Monograph, *Risks Associated with Smoking Cigarettes with Low Machine-Measured Yields of Tar and Nicotine*, that there is no “benefit to public health from changes in cigarette design and manufacturing over the last fifty years.”

It has been argued that Sweden’s relatively low smoking prevalence of 14% can be attributed in part to snus use. However, California also enjoys a 14% smoking prevalence, and it has attained this success without snus use.

The prevalence of smoking is much higher among those with lower levels of education and lower incomes - a phenomenon that is primarily due to tobacco industry marketing strategies and fewer educational opportunities. As an entity that addresses tobacco use and prevention among low-SES populations, the NNTPP opposes any products that may burden this population further. Even early research evidence justifies that there can be no support for any application where the use of any form of spit or snus tobacco is purported as less harmful than any other form of tobacco.

Conclusion:

All tobacco use causes disease and addiction. In view of that, the NNTPP agrees with CDC, NCI, and the National Institutes of Health in recommending that tobacco use be avoided and discontinued. Several non-tobacco methods have been shown to be effective for quitting cigarettes as well as other tobacco addictions. These methods include pharmacotherapies such as nicotine replacement therapy, proven cessation programs, individual and group counseling, and telephone or on-line tobacco cessation quitlines.

The use of all tobacco products, in any form, places low SES communities at greater risk for negative health outcomes. In accordance with its mission, the NNTPP will continue to identify resources and advocate for the elimination of tobacco use, in any form, among populations of low socioeconomic status.