

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota

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August 19, 2019

Members of City Council
City of Saint Paul
310 City Hall
15 Kellogg Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55102

Dear Honorable Members of City Council:

I am writing to urge you to support the proposed ordinance to raise the minimum sale age of tobacco products, including e-cigarettes, from 18 to 21.

As the largest health plan in Minnesota, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota is committed to improving the health of all Minnesotans, which is why we strongly support local policy change to keep youth away from the harms of tobacco.

We know that almost 95 percent of addicted smokers started smoking by the age of 21. The tobacco industry also knows this and heavily targets 18-to-21-year-olds. By using tactics like candy and menthol flavoring, magazine advertisements and event sponsorships to attract young people, the tobacco industry aggressively markets to youth and young adults to recruit replacement smokers and guarantee profits. Raising the age to 21 would result in a 25 percent reduction in initiation by 15-to-17-year-olds. Increasing the tobacco age and restricting menthol tobacco will prevent 30,000 Minnesota kids from becoming smokers over the next 15 years.

Youth tobacco use in Minnesota increased for the first time in 17 years and much of that was due to a 50 percent increase in the use of e-cigarettes or vaping products. This ordinance will have a direct impact on reducing youth access to these products.

In 2017, Blue Cross released a study showing that each year, smoking claims over 6,000 Minnesota lives and costs our state **\$7.5 billion** in health care costs and lost productivity. The staggering costs of tobacco in both health care costs and loss of life cannot be compared to the loss of profits for those who want to continue to sell these lethal products.

I hope you will take this positive step toward making a smoke-free generation for St. Paul youth.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Janelle Wilder".

Vice President, Community Health and Health Equity
Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota
Co-chair, Minnesotans for a Smoke-free Generation
smokefreegenmn.org

bluecrossmn.com