



AFRICAN AMERICAN TOBACCO CONTROL LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

ADVOCACY RESOURCE GUIDE

Empowering Communities Through
Education, Advocacy, and Action





WWW.SAVINGBLACKLIVES.ORG

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ADVOCACY

The AATCLC is a leading public health education and advocacy organization, taking on Big Tobacco to Save Black Lives.

The African American Tobacco Control Leadership Council (AATCLC) stands at the intersection of public health and social justice.

Since 2008, we have fought to Save Black Lives from the unique and targeted threats of the commercial tobacco industry. Through community education/engagement, coalition building, legal action, and thoughtful tobacco prevention policy, we work alongside community stakeholders, nonprofits, government agencies, and expert partners to dismantle the systems that allow menthol and flavored tobacco products to harm our communities.

TOBACCO ENDGAME RESOLUTIONS

Tobacco Endgame Resolutions help build support for Tobacco Endgame policies. Though not legally binding, these resolutions demonstrate that organizations view menthol as a serious health and social justice issue, which builds momentum and helps push policy forward.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the National Medical Association (NMA), 100 Black Men of America, Inc., Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., and the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) are just a few of the influential Black organizations that have passed resolutions denouncing racist tobacco industry targeting and supporting ending the sale of mentholated tobacco products to Save Black Lives.

PRIORITIZING MENTHOL AND FLAVORED TOBACCO BANS TO SAVE BLACK LIVES

Despite federal restrictions on flavored cigarettes, menthol and other flavored tobacco products remain legal and are still primarily marketed to African Americans, youth, and other historically marginalized groups. It is estimated that a ban on mentholated cigarettes in the United States would lead over 1.3 million people who smoke to quit, including 381,000 African Americans.

The AATCLC has been at the forefront of historic tobacco prevention policies to ban the sale of all flavored tobacco products, including menthol cigarettes, throughout its entire jurisdiction. In 2013, the AATCLC and partners fought for the city of Chicago to become the first U.S. city to limit the sale of flavored tobacco, including menthol, near schools.

In 2017, the city of San Francisco advanced the effort by becoming the first major city to entirely ban the sale of all flavored tobacco products, including menthol. Both campaigns highlighted menthol as the primary additive driving the nationwide commercial tobacco epidemic, the tobacco industry's predatory marketing practices, and focused on community engagement. Now, over 200 localities across the United States have banned mentholated tobacco products.

ORGANIZATIONAL, LOCAL, AND STATEWIDE RESOLUTIONS

Resolutions have a unique ability to lay the groundwork for real policy change and show strong community support without being legally binding. It often leads to stronger policies in the future. Advocating for a resolution empowers residents—especially youth, parents, and healthcare providers—to take an active role in shaping public health. Many state and national policies begin with local resolutions. It's how you build a case for change from the ground up.

The work of the African American Tobacco Control Leadership Council (AATCLC) continues to save lives by addressing how tobacco and new emerging smoking products negatively impact the social determinants of health in Black communities and other marginalized populations. From limited access to quality healthcare and education to targeted marketing in low-income neighborhoods, tobacco use and systemic inequities are uniquely intertwined.

The AATCLC addresses these challenges by promoting policies that aim to eliminate the sale and use of commercial tobacco and emerging smoking products, while also supporting community-led initiatives that promote health equity and community wellness. Through this work, we help shift the conditions that perpetuate harm by creating healthier environments, fostering economic and educational opportunity, and protecting future generations from the cycle of addiction and disease.

¹Fong GT, Chung-Hall J, Meng G, et al. Impact of Canada's menthol cigarette ban on quitting among menthol smokers: pooled analysis of pre-post evaluation from the ITC Project and the Ontario Menthol Ban Study and projections of impact in the USA. *Tob Control*. 2023;32(6):734-738. doi:10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2021-057227.

²Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. States & localities that have restricted the sale of flavored tobacco products [fact sheet]. Washington, DC: Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids; 2025 May 14.

In addition to our ongoing advocacy and policy work, AATCLC's team of subject matter experts is available to provide consulting services to organizations seeking to implement the non-traditional advocacy strategies featured in our resource guide. These approaches—ranging from faith-based engagement to legal interventions, grassroots mobilization, and culturally grounded education campaigns—offer actionable pathways to drive policy change and shift public narratives. We are committed to equipping communities and institutions with the tools, insights, and support needed to build effective, equity-centered tobacco control initiatives.



FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ADVOCACY AND HOW TO JOIN THE AATCLC'S NATIONAL TOBACCO CONTROL ADVOCATES NETWORK, CONTACT CHARLES DEBNAM AT charles@savingblacklives.org.

RESOURCES

www.savingblacklives.org

www.centerforblackhealth.org

www.publichealthlawcenter.org

SPOKEN WORD POETRY

Using the Power of Poetry to Speak Truth to the impact of Menthol on African American communities.

Tobacco prevention education and policy reform work must be rooted in culture, community, and truth. That's why the AATCLC has partnered with The Poet Life to launch a national campaign that uses spoken word as a tool for resistance and education. The No Menthol spoken word contests bring together poets, artists, policymakers, and advocates to confront the deadly impact of menthol and flavored tobacco in African American communities. Through live performances, educational workshops, and virtual campaigns, the No Menthol Spoken Word initiative has become a vessel for truth-telling, healing, and mobilization.

THE POWER OF THE MIC

In these spoken word contests, local poets perform original work that exposes the social injustices of menthol tobacco marketing and availability in the African American community. Performers are judged on a numeric scale by judges selected by the AATCLC and The Poet Life, and first, second, and third-place winners receive cash prizes.

We've taken this movement to the streets—hosting live spoken word contests in cities across the country, including Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Oakland, CA; Buffalo, NY; Harlem, NY; Washington, DC; Atlanta, GA; Denver, CO; Detroit, MI; and Baltimore, MD. These events don't just entertain—they ignite change, move hearts, and elevate local talent while exposing the tobacco industry's tactics for all to see. Policymakers, community members, and youth leave inspired—and ready to act.

FROM PROTEST TO POLICY: WHAT THE MOVEMENT LOOKS LIKE

Youth & Adult Poetry Contests: Create spoken word battles that center lived experience and resistance, while rewarding excellence with visibility and cash prizes.

Youth Poetry Workshops: Provide interactive, culturally grounded spaces where young people learn to use their voice as a weapon against Big Tobacco.

Multi-State Poetry Showcase Campaigns: Lead campaigns uniting poets across states to amplify the message and uplift stories of resilience and resistance.

Mini-Grant Artist Collaborations: Fund artists to create bold, visual, and performance-based projects that directly confront the predatory marketing practices used by the tobacco industry.



WHY THIS MATTERS

Poetry transforms pain into power. It breaks through apathy, bypasses resistance, and reaches the heart. By centering community voices—especially those of youth, artists, and individuals most harmed by menthol—we make advocacy personal, emotional, and impossible to ignore.

Art brings culture to the cause. It humanizes policy. It reminds us that this fight isn't just about tobacco—it's about justice, life, and legacy.

PARTNER FOR IMPACT

Led by **Christoph Jenkins, Founder of The Poet Life** and Creative Strategist for the AATCLC, The Poet Life is strategically aligning the arts with public health. Together, we are redefining advocacy through rhythm, resistance, and community power.

If your organization or community is ready to stand up, speak out, and spit truth to power, The Poet Life is your creative partner.

This is our voice. This is our movement.

This is how we Save Black lives.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON HOW TO UTILIZE SPOKEN WORD POETRY TO UPLIFT YOUR ADVOCACY EFFORTS, CONTACT CHRISTOPH JENKINS AT info@ThePoetLife.com

Christoph Jenkins, Founder, The Poet Life
ThePoetLife.com/TobaccoControl
Social Media: @ThePoetLife

RESOURCES:

www.savingblacklives.org/spoken-word-poetry

www.thepoetlife.com



NON-TRADITIONAL OUTREACH AND MARKETING

Using story videos to drive people to take action

For every campaign, the most powerful tools are stories from community members. Stories from individuals directly affected by menthol and other flavored tobacco products should be at the forefront of communications efforts.

People don't remember what you say; they remember how you make them feel. Storytelling enables us to have a profound emotional impact on our target audience.

Advocacy campaigns must focus on building a strong coalition of organizations and supporters to leverage storytelling efforts, collect stories, and deploy the message to your target audience early and often to drive the mission.

STORY COLLECTION AND DISTRIBUTION

Capturing professional video footage is ideal; otherwise, record stories in person with your phone or record online video calls. Next, use video editing software to create short 15- to 30-second clips with added graphic frames that showcase your call to action. Consider subtitles when publishing on social media.

Here are some good questions to ask during your interviews to get the best stories from community members:

- *How have flavored tobacco products impacted you, your family, and your community?*
- *Why do you think the flavors hook so many kids?*
- *How does it make you feel that Big Tobacco is targeting your community?*
- *How do the health disparities caused by Big Tobacco's targeting of communities of color make you feel?*
- *What would passing legislation ending the sale of flavored tobacco products mean for your community?*
- *Why should elected officials act now?*

To capture the best footage, ensure that interviewees answer in complete sentences, including a repetition of the question in their response. Don't be afraid to help guide the conversation to capture the best content. If someone starts telling a compelling personal story, dig into it and encourage them to show their emotions.

When your product is finalized, send the videos directly to elected officials and their staff. If you have the funds, consider running the videos as ads on Meta or Google Ads, targeting the building where elected officials meet through geofencing. You can also geofence the home addresses of your target audience. Also, be sure to leverage your coalition partners and supporters to share the stories on their social media platforms.

WHO CAN I CONTACT AT AATCLC FOR MORE INFO?

Contact AATCLC Marketing and Communications Lead Josh Brown at josh@brownstrategy.com to learn more and get help with storytelling for your campaign.

GREAT STORY VIDEOS EXAMPLES

Flavors Hook Kids Denver:
www.youtube.com/@flavorshookkidsdenver

Keep Michigan Tobacco Free Alliance:
www.youtube.com/@keepmikitobaccofree



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

“Culture shapes the process of community engagement, and effective engagement requires an understanding of culture.”³

The African American Tobacco Control Leadership Council (AATCLC) centers authentic, grassroots community engagement as the core of its work to end the devastating impact of menthol and flavored tobacco products in African American communities. Change starts in our neighborhoods, our churches, our schools, and our artistic spaces. That’s why we engage community members not just as participants, but as leaders, educators, and advocates in this fight for health justice.

Initiatives like No Menthol Sunday, Breaking Free from Nicotine Day, the Quantum Leap Leadership Development Initiative, and public art and activism events, such as No Menthol Spoken Word Contests and Menthol Funeral events, help local advocates build public will, drive civic engagement, and demand action from elected officials. This grassroots infrastructure has not only shaped local victories but also laid the groundwork for state and federal tobacco control policy.

Our approach is relationship-based and built on trust. We encourage our

³ CTSA Community Engagement Key Function Committee. Principles of Community Engagement, 2nd ed. Bethesda, MD: National Institutes of Health; June 2011. Available from: UC Davis Health website.

partners and coalitions to start simple: check in just to say “hi,” ask how you can support ongoing efforts, and show up consistently with no hidden agenda. Whether that means offering to volunteer at a local event, promoting a partner’s event on social media, or supporting local artists, community engagement begins with showing up and acknowledging the numerous social justice issues that extend beyond tobacco control.

In addition to showing up for the community, supporting policy change requires engaging elected officials with purpose and heart. We encourage partners to share relatable narratives and powerful testimonials in letters of support or meetings with decision-makers. Let them hear your “why.” Speak from experience and include positive reasons why the policy matters—how it will uplift your family, your neighborhood, your faith community. When drafting your letter, take the time to check the tone, emotion, and clarity of your message. A well-crafted letter that weaves together data and lived experience can move hearts and shift votes.

The AATCLC provides technical assistance and creative guidance to community-based organizations, Local Lead Agencies, educational institutions, and others seeking to address tobacco prevention. Whether you’re organizing a spoken word contest, meeting with a legislator, or working to build community capacity, we’re here to support you with tools, strategy, and subject matter expertise to help you brainstorm next steps.

RESOURCES

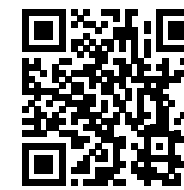
To learn more about the AATCLC’s community engagement efforts, contact Ernesta Wright at thegreenfoundation333@gmail.com.

Ernesta Wright, Community Engagement Liaison, African American Tobacco Control Leadership Council (AATCLC)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



**EVERYDAY
ADVOCACY**
National Council
of Nonprofits



**BOLDER
ADVOCACY**
Resource
Library Alliance
for Justice



**AMERICAN
COUNSELING
ASSOCIATION**
2025 Legislative
Agenda



THE MENTHOL FUNERAL

Laying Menthol to Rest

A “Menthol Funeral” is a symbolic protest that honors lives lost to tobacco-related diseases while exposing the tobacco industry’s predatory targeting of African American communities. These events use the format of a traditional funeral to drive home the deadly consequences of menthol cigarettes. Usually beginning with realistic processions complete with a casket designed to resemble a menthol cigarette box, live music, prayer, and provoking testimonies, the Menthol Funeral is a unique public ceremony that creates a space for storytelling, education, and entertainment.

The Menthol Funeral features a traditional funeral procession with caskets designed to resemble menthol cigarette boxes, live music, prayer, and testimonies that serve as a call to action to end the sale of deadly tobacco products. Typically held outdoors for public viewing, the Menthol Funeral is a unique public demonstration that creates a space for storytelling, education, and entertainment.



For support, ideas, or guidance on organizing a Menthol Funeral, contact Minou Jones at mjones@umakeitcount.org.

Minou Jones, FOUNDER AND CEO, Making it Count Community Development Corporation, Council Member, African American Tobacco Control Leadership Council (AATCLC)



AATCLC'S D9 ADVOCACY WORK

The National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC), commonly referred to as the “Divine Nine,” along with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), play essential roles in our fight against commercial tobacco. Understanding the significant cultural influence of Black Greek-letter organizations and HBCUs, the AATCLC has partnered with these groups to raise awareness about the disproportionate impact of menthol cigarettes on Black communities.

In February 2025, AATCLC hosted a nationwide “Nicotine, Menthol, and Melanin” webinar—specifically inviting Divine Nine and HBCU leaders to a powerful call to action after Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., 100 Black Men, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) each adopted resolutions recognizing the harms menthol tobacco has imposed on African American communities for decades. This virtual event provided a platform for discussing the disproportionate health impact of menthol and mobilizing culturally connected partners for policy engagement.

The AATCLC’s partnerships with established African American civil rights and social organizations emphasize that ending the sale of menthol tobacco will protect the African American community across the nation. This move will not harm our communities, contrary to the tobacco industry’s claims about increased police interactions.



YOU CAN TAKE MEANINGFUL ACTION BY:

Engaging Your Chapter: Host educational sessions, webinars, or community events focused on menthol tobacco and health equity.

Sharing Educational Content: Use AATCLC’s D9 Webinar and toolkit resources to educate your network.

Supporting or Adopting a Resolution: Follow the lead of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., 100 Black Men, and other organizations by identifying the steps needed to introduce a menthol resolution in your organization.

Amplifying Quit Resources: Promote tools like Kick It California and culturally responsive cessation programs.

Elevating Advocacy: Testify at hearings, attend council meetings, and use your platform to push for menthol bans.

To learn more about the AATCLC’s D9 efforts, please contact Dr. Valerie Yerger at aatcl1@gmail.com.

RESOURCES

Watch: AATCLC’s Divine Nine Webinar
<https://www.savingblacklives.org/d9-webinar>

Saving Black Lives – AATCLC
<https://www.savingblacklives.org>

Kick It California – Free Quit Support
<https://kickitca.org>

AMPLIFY – African American Coordinating Center
<https://www.amplify.love>

CONTACT AATCLC FOR A RESOLUTION TEMPLATE



NON-TRADITIONAL CESSATION SERVICES AND ADVOCACY WORK

The AATCLC and partners address smoking cessation with cultural awareness, community empowerment, and collective healing to effectively liberate African Americans from nicotine use.

BREAKING FREE FROM NICOTINE DAY

Launched by Dr. Karen J. Beard, a Certified Tobacco Treatment Specialist, Breaking Free from Nicotine Day is held annually on the third Monday of November and serves as both a symbolic gesture and a call to action to address commercial tobacco addiction. This day honors African Americans who have quit nicotine, fostering hope and community support. The day's focus on shared stories inspires others, demonstrating that quitting is possible and reaffirming the collective strength required to resist tobacco dependence.

AMPLIFY! CESSATION SUPPORT

California's African American Coordinating Center (AACC), AMPLIFY!, provides culturally tailored tobacco and vaping cessation tools for Black communities. Their platform offers counseling resources for individuals and families, as well as professional toolkits, and expands through digital outreach. With a mission "to empower African Americans ... to free themselves ... from nicotine dependence," it delivers culturally competent support.



HOW YOU CAN ENGAGE

- Share and celebrate quit stories, promoting visibility and resilience.
- Address the uniquely addictive qualities of mentholated tobacco products.
- Access culturally relevant counseling, toolkits, and online support.
- Link quitting to a positive change, framing cessation as an act of liberation.

To learn more about the AATCLC cessation services, contact Dr. Karen J. Beard at drbeard@amplify.love or Y'Lonn Burris at yburris@amplify.love

Dr. Karen J. Beard
Certified Tobacco Treatment Specialist
Council Member, African American Tobacco Control Leadership Council

Y'Lonn Burris
Program Manager, AMPLIFY, The African American Coordinating Center
Council Member, African American Tobacco Control Leadership Council

RESOURCES

AMPLIFY, The African American Coordinating Center
www.amplify.love
www.freeandproud.com

Kick It California: Free, evidence-based tobacco cessation program
www.kickitca.org



THE LAWSUIT

In 2020, the AATCLC and Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) filed a lawsuit against the FDA for its delay in removing mentholated tobacco products from the marketplace despite overwhelming scientific evidence indicating that menthol should be removed. Subsequently and importantly, the American Medical Association (AMA) and the National Medical Association (NMA) joined the lawsuit as plaintiffs. When the FDA initiated the rulemaking process, the AATCLC withdrew its lawsuit.

The AATCLC filed another lawsuit in April 2024, despite the FDA still not having taken the appropriate action. This lawsuit was filed more than seven months after the FDA's initial deadline for finalizing the new rule and follows the FDA's 15-year delay in implementing equitable policymaking.

HISTORICAL TIMELINE

- In 2009, the FDA banned 13 flavored cigarettes, excluding menthol.
- The FDA's own advisory body (TPSAC) concluded in 2011 that removing menthol would benefit public health.
- Rulemaking efforts to ban menthol were repeatedly delayed or redacted (2013, 2016, 2017, 2019).
- The first menthol lawsuit was filed on June 17, 2020.
- A second lawsuit was filed on April 2, 2024, following multiple failed promises from the FDA.
- In September 2024, additional individual plaintiffs were added to the lawsuit.
- In early 2025, the Trump administration withdrew the proposed rule.

HOW CAN THIS BE USED IN ADVOCACY WORK?

- Raise awareness about the role of government inaction and industry influence on public health policy.
- Pressure elected officials to demand that the FDA finalize and enact the menthol ban.
- Educate communities about the disproportionate impact of menthol marketing on African Americans.
- Mobilize constituents to support plaintiffs and encourage them to engage in public comment when the rule is reopened.
- Use it as a case study in presentations, letters, or campaigns about systemic injustice in tobacco control.

WHAT CAN I DO?

- Share the story of this lawsuit in your community or on social media.
- Contact local and federal representatives to urge action on menthol regulation.
- Organize or participate in community forums to discuss the racialized impact of menthol.
- Support AATCLC and co-plaintiffs through letters of support, coalition-building, or fundraising.

WHO CAN I CONTACT AT AATCLC FOR MORE INFO?

For technical support or strategic planning guidance, contact Dr. Phillip Gardiner at gmoney.gardiner@gmail.com

Phillip Gardiner, DrPH

Co-Chair, African American Tobacco Control Leadership Council (AATCLC)

RESOURCES

www.publichealthlawcenter.org



SAME GAME, DIFFERENT SMOKERS

This traveling exhibit, initially developed by San Francisco-based visual artist and community activist Tracy Brown, explores the nearly 400 years of tobacco industry exploitation of African American communities as well as the resistance.

Same Game, Different Smokers covers events from the transatlantic slave trade to modern-day e-cigarette marketing through archival advertisements, internal tobacco industry documents, and visual art. Viewers are challenged to examine the deeply racialized strategies that have influenced mentholated tobacco use in African American communities for generations.

WHAT THE EXHIBITION REVEALS

Historic Roots: There is a connection between tobacco cultivation and slavery.

Menthol Manipulation: The rise in the use of menthol cigarettes is a direct result of tobacco companies' aggressive marketing to African Americans through predatory branding, misleading health claims, and oversaturation of ads in African American media and neighborhoods.

Media & Marketing: Tobacco companies infiltrated Black magazines, events, and radio with deceptive sponsorships and advertisements, promoting hazardous products as symbols of status and success.

Youth Addiction Playbook: The shift from traditional cigarettes to flavored vapes used similar targeting tactics, but new packaging. The exhibition exposes how commercial tobacco companies used flavored e-cigarettes to attract a new generation of tobacco users.

Resistance and Resilience: The compelling stories of organizers, artists, pastors, and policymakers who have fought back through community protests are disclosed.



***Same Game, Different Smokers* is a catalyst for our work towards Saving Black Lives**

- Educate communities and students about tobacco's racialized history.
- Train advocates and public health professionals.
- Support local campaigns aimed at ending the sale of menthol and flavored tobacco products.
- Engage elected officials and advocate for meaningful policy change.

WHO CAN I CONTACT AT AATCLC FOR MORE INFO?

For technical support or to host the *Same Game Different Smokers* exhibit, contact Carol McGruder at cmcgruder@usa.net

Carol McGruder

Co-Chair, African American Tobacco Control Leadership Council (AATCLC)



www.savingblacklives.org

