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Fargo Cass



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Testimony
Senate Bill 2281
House Finance and Taxation
March 11, 2025

Chairman Headland and members of the House Finance and Taxation Committee, I am, Abby Lange, a Community Health Educator in Health Promotions at Fargo Cass Public Health. I serve our community by addressing two critical public health concerns: tobacco use and mental health. It is no secret that substance use and mental health are deeply interconnected.

Each year, over 1,000 people in North Dakota die from smoking-related illnesses. Tobacco remains the leading cause of preventable death in the United States, with decades of research documenting the severe health consequences of cigarettes. However, we do not yet fully understand the long-term impact of nicotine pouches and vapes. What we do know is that these products deliver highly concentrated doses of nicotine and are increasingly popular among youth.

The CDC recommends a three-pronged approach to reducing tobacco-related illness and death. One of the most effective strategies is increasing the price of tobacco products. Research shows that for every 10% increase in price, youth tobacco use declines by approximately 6.5%. Despite this proven strategy, North Dakota has not increased its tobacco tax since 1993—long before today's youth were even born. In fact, many of the nicotine products most used by young people are not taxed at all beyond sales tax.

One young adult I worked with, who has struggled for years to quit, summed up the issue perfectly:
"It's cheaper to just keep vaping."

This heartbreaking reality means that people who genuinely want to quit remain trapped in addiction simply because it's more affordable to continue using nicotine than to seek cessation support.

In my work assisting individuals who want to quit tobacco, I've found a common and alarming trend: most people I've worked with started using nicotine between the ages of 12 and 17—well below the legal purchasing age. This is particularly concerning because adolescence is a critical period for brain development, especially in areas responsible for impulse control and emotional regulation. Nicotine is known to affect how those areas develop. The nicotine content in modern products is exponentially higher than in traditional cigarettes; for example, a single 5,000-puff vape contains as much nicotine as approximately 500 cigarettes. Many youths consume these devices within two weeks or less.

Tobacco use doesn't just affect individuals, it impacts families and communities. Nearly everyone has a story of a loved one whose life was negatively affected by tobacco addiction. I urge you to reflect on your own experiences with loved ones. If there are any questions, I would be pleased to answer them.

Thank you for all your work and your time.

Respectfully,

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Vision: Healthy People in Healthy Communities

Mission: To *prevent* disease and injury, *promote* wellness and *protect* community health.