

# 2015 Menthol Cigarette Intervention Grant

In 2015, the Minnesota Legislature passed a bill requiring MDH to fund a one-time grant of \$200,000 through the Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP). It was awarded to Hennepin County Public Health in partnership with Minneapolis Department of Health, Saint Paul-Ramsey Public Health, and Bloomington Public Health.

This grant must engage members of the African American community and community-based organizations to implement strategies and interventions to reduce the disproportionately high use of cigarettes by African Americans, especially the use of menthol-flavored cigarettes. Thus, Hennepin County Public Health is working closely with the African American Leadership Forum (AALF) to lead community engagement, awareness raising, and mobilization throughout the project. AALF is a network of over 1,200 African American individuals united in their belief that they can do more – together – and it has leaders in community change, including business, nonprofits, government, education, health, religion, politics, philanthropy, the arts, and grassroots organizing.

The ultimate goal of this grant is to implement a set of community-driven strategies and interventions to address the disproportionately high rates of menthol tobacco use in the African American community and help prevent and reduce the chronic disease and mortality burden that tobacco exacts on this community. This two-year grant ends October 31, 2017.

## Local survey assesses menthol perceptions and attitudes.

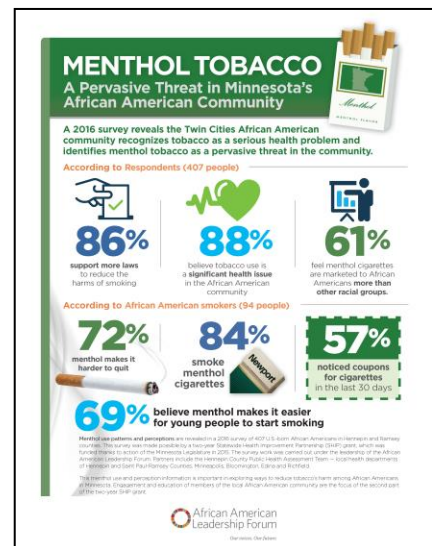
As part of this grant, the African American Leadership Forum, in coordination with Hennepin County Public Health, surveyed a convenience sample of 407 African Americans in Hennepin and Ramsey counties from May through July 2016.

This assessment was a first step to deepen understanding of African American use patterns and perceptions and attitudes toward menthol tobacco. It will serve as a basis for community engagement and education in the last grant year.

Twenty-four percent of the respondents are current smokers.

## U.S.-born African Americans<sup>1</sup> confirm menthol tobacco is a serious threat to their health.

- 84% of surveyed smokers smoke a brand that is menthol.
- 72% of surveyed smokers agreed menthol makes it harder to quit.



<sup>1</sup> Hereafter referred to as African Americans

## Menthol's soothing effect and minty taste makes smoking easier and more attractive, especially for youth.

- Surveyed menthol smokers were attracted to menthol products because they taste and feel different than other types of cigarettes; the top three reasons for using menthol: It's soothing, cooling, and "tastes better" than non-menthol.
- 69% of surveyed smokers agreed menthol's cooling sensation makes it easier for young people to start smoking.

## African American community members are targeted by tobacco industry marketing.

- 83% of surveyed smokers get their cigarettes at gas stations or convenience stores – locations commonly visited on a day-to-day basis.
- 61% of respondents agree menthol cigarettes are marketed to African Americans more than other racial groups
- In the past 30 days, one in four of all respondents noticed:
  - Cigarettes at sale prices.
  - Coupons for cigarettes.
  - Advertisements for cigarettes in magazines.
- 57% of surveyed smokers noticed coupons for cigarettes in the past 30 days.
- 28% of surveyed smokers noticed cigarettes promotions in the mail in the past 30 days.

## Survey results reinforce the need to educate and raise awareness on the harms of menthol tobacco use.

- 88% of respondents thought tobacco use was a significant health issue in the African American community.
- 57% of surveyed smokers didn't know menthol cigarettes are just as harmful as other cigarettes.
- 44% of surveyed smokers wrongly thought menthol cigarettes are less harmful than other cigarettes.

## A majority of African American community members support new laws to reduce tobacco's harm.

- 69% of surveyed smokers supported more laws to reduce the harms of smoking.
- 60% of surveyed smokers said they would quit if menthol was no longer sold in stores.

**Learn more at [www.health.mn.gov/menthol](http://www.health.mn.gov/menthol).**

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