

# NC Alliance For Health Tobacco 21

## Tobacco 21: Protecting North Carolina's Youth from Vaping and Nicotine Addiction

### A Crisis We Can't Ignore

Every year, thousands of young people in North Carolina are lured into a lifelong struggle with nicotine addiction. **95% of tobacco users start before they turn 21**, and with over **27% of high school students** reporting tobacco use in our state, the rise of e-cigarettes is fueling an alarming epidemic. It's time for North Carolina to act.

We have the power to protect our youth, save lives, and secure a healthier future for our state. By raising the minimum tobacco sales age from 18 to 21 and establishing a retailer permitting system, we can stop tobacco addiction before it starts.

### Why Tobacco 21 Matters

- **Protect Developing Brains:** Nicotine is especially harmful to teens, disrupting brain circuits that control attention, learning, and addiction.
- **Reduce Youth Access:** Most teens who use tobacco get it from friends or retailers who sell to those under 21. Raising the purchase age cuts off this supply chain.
- **Save Lives and Prevent Disease:** Tobacco use is a leading cause of preventable death and disease in North Carolina, linked to one in five deaths annually.

### The Solution: A Comprehensive Approach

Implementing Tobacco 21 in North Carolina means:

- Raising the legal tobacco product sales age to 21, aligning state law with federal standards.
- Establishing a retailer permitting system to improve merchant education, enforce compliance, and hold violators accountable.
- Reducing confusion for retailers and consumers by harmonizing state and federal laws.
- Helping schools combat e-cigarette use and protecting students from the health and academic impacts of nicotine addiction.