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September 30, 2015

The Honorable Diana DeGette
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative DeGette:

We are writing to express our support for the Tobacco to 21 Act, a bill that would make it unlawful to sell or distribute a tobacco product to anyone under the age of 21. Your bill will reduce the number of young people who use and become addicted to tobacco products and, ultimately, help to reduce the disease and premature death that these products cause.

Tobacco products remain the leading preventable cause of death in the United States and are responsible for approximately \$170 billion in health care costs each year. Tobacco use almost always begins during adolescence and young adulthood. About 95 percent of adult smokers began smoking before they turned 21. According to the U.S. Surgeon General, if current trends continue, 5.6 million of today's youth will die prematurely from a smoking-related illness.

Increasing the age for sale of tobacco products to 21 will help counter the tobacco industry's efforts to target young people at a critical time when many move from experimenting with tobacco to regular smoking. It will also help keep tobacco out of high schools, where younger teens often obtain tobacco products from older students.

In March, the Institute of Medicine concluded that increasing the tobacco sale age would reduce the number of adolescents and young adults who start smoking; reduce smoking-caused deaths; and immediately improve the health of adolescents, young adults and young mothers who would be deterred from smoking, as well as their children. The greatest impact would be among adolescents age 15 to 17, who would no longer be able to pass for legal age and would have a harder time obtaining cigarettes from their older friends and classmates.

Increasing the tobacco sale age to 21 also has broad public support. A survey by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), released in July, found that 75 percent of adults support increasing the minimum age for sale of tobacco products to 21.

We applaud your leadership in introducing a bill that would reduce the number of young people who start on a path that too often leads to addiction, disease, and premature death.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Pediatrics

American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network

American Heart Association

American Lung Association

Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids