

Much more must be done to lower smoking rates, experts say

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American Lung Association points to legislative inaction by states, stronger push by Big Tobacco.

(HealthDay)— State inaction and tobacco industry tactics are slowing tobacco control efforts in the United States, a new report from the American Lung Association finds.

"We are faced with a deep-pocketed, ever-evolving [tobacco](#) industry that's determined to maintain its market share at the expense of our kids and current smokers," Harold Wimmer, ALA national president and CEO, said in a statement from the group. "In the absence of any meaningful action by state and federal policymakers, an ever-changing Big Tobacco will continue to gain more customers unless our nation's leaders step up to fund programs and enact policies proven to make tobacco history."

According to the ALA report issued Wednesday, states spent \$485.5

million on programs aimed at curbing tobacco use in 2013, a rise from \$462.5 million in 2012. However, only two states—Alaska and North Dakota—had levels of funding on these programs that matched levels recommended by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. And 40 states and the District of Columbia failed to fund their tobacco prevention programs at even half of the CDC level.

In 2013, Massachusetts and Minnesota were the only states that approved significant hikes in cigarette taxes, and no state approved a comprehensive smoke-free workplace law, the report found. North Dakota was the only one of the 50 states to pass a comprehensive smoke-free law in the past three years.

Many Americans also lack access to therapies that experts know can help smokers quit. Only two states provide Medicaid enrollees with coverage for all seven U.S. Food and Drug Administration-approved anti-smoking medications and three forms of counseling, and only four states do so for state employees.

On the other hand, the ALA said that [tobacco companies](#) are getting around current anti-smoking efforts by aggressively marketing other [tobacco products](#), such as [smokeless tobacco](#) (chewing and dipping tobacco, snuff) and cigars. They are also aggressively promoting electronic cigarettes.

"There is no federal oversight of these products, and the e-cigarette industry is using celebrity spokespeople to glamorize its products, making unproven health claims, encouraging smokers to switch instead of quit, and creating candy- and fruit-flavored products to attract youth," the ALA said in the statement.

E-cigarettes are not regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, but the agency is mulling doing so, the group noted.

These products are surging in popularity, with the use of e-cigarettes by youth and adults doubling in just one year, according to 2013 studies by the CDC.

Almost half a million Americans die each year due to tobacco-related illnesses, such as lung cancer and other cancers, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), heart disease and stroke. In addition, tobacco use is linked to \$280 billion in health care costs and lost productivity annually, according to the recently released 2014 Surgeon General's report.

"Despite strides in reducing smoking rates in America by half in the last 50 years, tobacco use remains the leading cause of preventable death and illness in the U.S., including lung cancer, the number one cancer killer of both men and women in America," Wimmer said.

The American Lung Association and its partners have called for action by all levels of government to achieve three ambitious goals:

- Cut smoking rates from the current levels of about 18 percent to less than 10 percent by 2024
- Protect all Americans from secondhand smoke within five years
- Eliminate the toll of death and illness tied to tobacco use.

"If these goals are to be realized and lives are to be saved, federal and state governments must enact these lifesaving policies," Wimmer said.

"In short, our nation cannot afford the health or financial consequences of failing to act."

More information: The American Cancer Society offers a [guide to quitting smoking](#).

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