

PRESS RELEASE



Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Public Law 21-41 (Tobacco 21 Law): New Law Prohibits Individuals Under Age 21 From Purchasing and Using Tobacco Products

In January 2021, Gov. Ralph DLG Torres signed into law Public Law 21-41, which increases penalties to businesses that give, sell, or permit to be given or sold any tobacco product(s) to individuals under the age of 21. The new penalties for each offense are as follows:

First Offense: A maximum fine of \$500, in addition to undergoing re-certification training.

Second Offense: A maximum fine of \$1,000 and a license suspension of up to seven days, in addition to undergoing re-certification training.

Third Offense: A minimum fine of \$5,000 and a suspension of the license for up to six months, in addition to undergoing re-certification training.

Examples of "tobacco products" are: cigarettes, cigars, roll-your-own tobacco, pipe tobacco, hookah tobacco, smokeless tobacco, nicotine gels, dissolvables, vaporizers, and other electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey (YRBSS), 29% of students in grade 9-12 in 2019 reported that they currently smoke cigarettes or use electronic cigarettes, which is a significant 43.3% increase from 2017. A slight increase was also reported in youth that currently use smokeless tobacco, up to 16% in 2019 from 15% in 2017. This is an alarming increase because this means that more youth could develop lung, heart, and oral disease, as well as many types of cancer.

According to the Incidence Data reported by the Pacific Regional Central Cancer Registry of 2007-2018, more than half (68%) of CNMI's adult cancers are tobacco-related. Out of the 445 total adult cancer cases, 112 cases are tobacco-related cancers. The data also show that most are being diagnosed with cancer in the later stages, which leads to poor survival outcomes. These numbers point to the need for ongoing population health interventions to aid in chronic disease prevention and treatment. The data provided strongly suggest the importance of annual check-ups and quitting tobacco use. Evidence based interventions show that that tobacco related illnesses can decrease with the help of early detection of

cancer and community wide prevention methods. The new PL 21-41 (Tobacco 21 Law), is an important contribution. Increasing the age required to purchase tobacco can reduce the risk of nicotine dependency and the risk of developing oral cancer, heart disease, lung cancer, and COPD. In addition, this will also complement the existing law, **Public Law 16-46 (Smoke Free Air Act)**, which prohibits people from smoking/vaping in public areas, such as government facilities, restaurants, and schools, which also helps reduce exposure to secondhand smoke by non-smokers and those especially vulnerable.

The Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation (CHCC) recognizes and appreciates the support of Gov. Ralph DLG Torres who signed this bill that was authored by Rep. Joel C. Camacho of Precinct 4. We also extend our thanks to all the stakeholders and the Alcoholic Beverage & Tobacco Control (ABTC) headed by Director David Maratita for providing their assistance and seeing this motion through. The Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation (CHCC) has found that oral cancer cases have been gradually increasing in incidence over the past several years, with 7 out of 10 cases diagnosed in stages 3 and 4. Tobacco and betel nut use are the only causes of oral cancer in the CNMI. Many of our community members are suffering because of this NCD revealing that we need to work together to reduce the burden of NCD's in the CNMI. The CHCC and its partners have been and continue to educate and provide oral cancer screening to the public.

We aim to continue our public services that compliments this monumental event in order to solidify and positively impact our community. This year, CHCC plans to launch another "Oral Cancer Campaign" which will focus on empowering individuals to quit, seek opportunities for cancer screening and early detection, increase nicotine cessation participants all to reduce the burden of this disease. CHCC will also be collaborating with stakeholders to provide screening and management options throughout the CNMI.

For resources online, visit the site at: <https://truthinitiative.org/>, <https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/>, to learn more about tobacco and e-cigarette health risks for children and young adults.

For a **free oral health screening**, visit the **CHCC Oral Health Clinic** or call **(670) 236-8369**.

For support to quit tobacco use, contact the **Tobacco Prevention and Control Program's Nicotine Cessation Program** at **(670) 323-7848 (QUIT)** to learn more about program services and upcoming Cessation classes.

To report establishment(s) in violation of the Smoke Free Air Act, Report a violation: <https://tinyurl.com/PL1646violations>. Quitline: 670-323-QUIT (7848)

For an immediate assistance regarding Tobacco 21 regulation, please contact **Alcoholic Beverages and Tobacco Control (ABTC)** at **(670) 488-1006** or via email info@commerce.gov.mp

To report any illegal sale of alcohol, betelnut, and tobacco, contact the **ABTC Hotline (670) 285-1821**.

For more information about CHCC programs, please follow us on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter at @cnmichcc, check out our website at www.chcc.gov.mp or call us at (670) 234-8950.

This press release may be found online at <http://www.chcc.gov.mp/pressrelease.html>