

LGBT+ young people have higher smoking and vaping prevalence than non-LGBT+ peers

New Truth Initiative® research finds **that a higher proportion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender young people used cigarettes and e-cigarettes in 2021 compared to their non-LGBT+ peers**, highlighting persistent disparities in tobacco use among this group. The findings build on long-established research that shows LGBT individuals use tobacco products at higher prevalence than their cisgender heterosexual peers.^{1,2} Disparities in tobacco use among this population are partly due to decades of decades of targeted marketing by the tobacco industry.^{3,4}

A previous Truth Initiative analysis found higher rates of e-cigarette use among lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) youth compared to heterosexual youth between 2020 and 2021. The new research shows young people who identify as LGB continue to use tobacco at a consistently higher prevalence than their heterosexual peers across tobacco products, and contributes new data about transgender, nonbinary, and not-cisgender young people.

Research has also shown that harassment and discrimination of LGBT+ individuals increases stress^{5,6} and leads to higher prevalence of tobacco use.^{1,2,7} The rising number of anti-LGBT+ policies⁸ in the last two years compounded with the ongoing youth mental health crisis puts this population at even greater risk of nicotine addiction and related mental health concerns.



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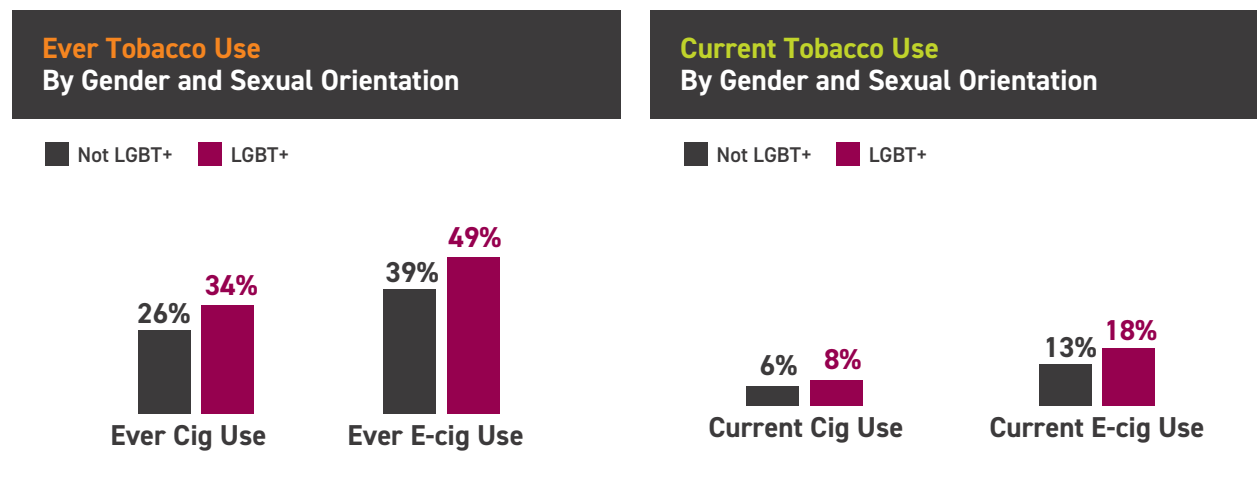
TOBACCO USE IS HIGHER AMONG LGBT+ YOUNG PEOPLE COMPARED TO NON-LGBT+ PEERS

Truth Initiative researchers examined data from 6,122 young people ages 15 to 31 surveyed between July 2021 and October 2021 as part of the ongoing Truth Longitudinal Cohort study. Young people were asked about their sexual orientation, gender identity, and use of cigarettes and e-cigarettes.¹

Participants identifying as lesbian or gay, bisexual, another identity, or questioning were considered "not heterosexual." Respondents were also asked about their sex assigned at birth and their current gender identity (male, female, transgender, nonbinary, or a different identity). Individuals who had different responses for sex assigned at birth and their current gender identity were considered "not cisgender." Any participant identifying as "not heterosexual" and/or "not cisgender" was considered LGBT+. Participants were asked if they had ever used a cigarette or e-cigarette or if they currently used the products in the past 30 days.

The analysis found that ever or current use of cigarettes and e-cigarettes is higher among LGBT+ young people compared to their non-LGBT+ peers:

- > **Higher vaping prevalence:** More LGBT+ young people have ever used e-cigarettes (49% vs. 39%) and currently use e-cigarettes (18% vs. 13%) compared to those who did not identify as LGBT+.
- > **Higher smoking prevalence:** Young people who identify as LGBT+ more frequently report ever using cigarettes (34% vs. 26%) as well as currently using cigarettes (8% vs. 6%) compared to their non-LGBT+ peers.



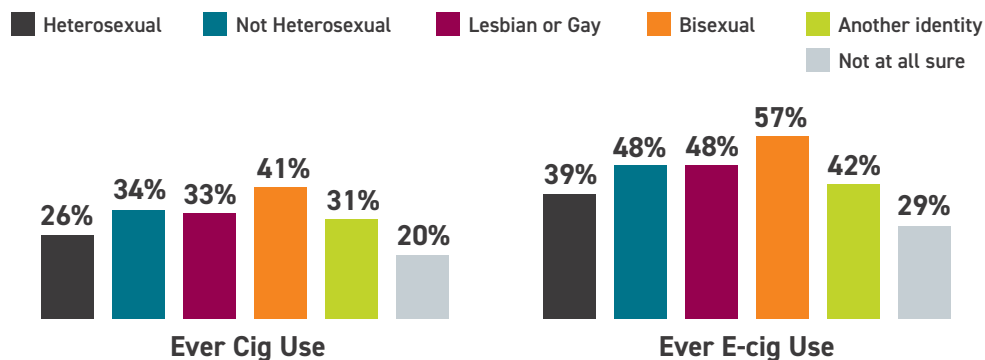
¹ Because the sample size for "not cisgender" individuals was very small, researchers were unable to weight the sample to national estimates, limiting the generalizability of this analysis.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION: DISPARITIES AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE WHO DO NOT IDENTIFY AS HETEROSEXUAL

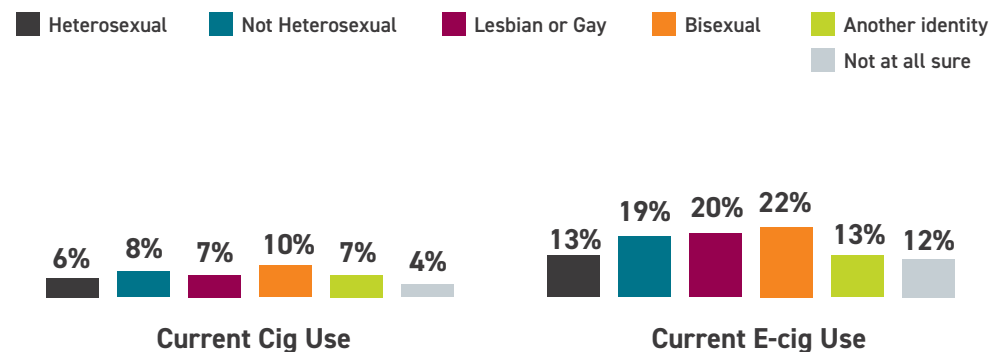
Across the board, young people who do not identify as heterosexual have ever or are currently using e-cigarettes and cigarettes to a greater extent than their heterosexual peers. Below are some of the notable disparities:

- > **Bisexual young people have higher tobacco use prevalence.** Compared to heterosexual peers, bisexual young people reported higher prevalence of ever using cigarettes (41% vs 26%), currently using cigarettes (10% vs 6%), ever using e-cigarettes (57% vs 39%), and currently using e-cigarettes (22% vs 13%).
- > **Lesbian and gay young people report high tobacco use prevalence,** with a greater proportion reporting cigarette use (33% vs 26%) and e-cigarette use (48% vs. 39%) compared to their heterosexual peers.
- > Overall, all individuals **who did not identify as heterosexual** reported ever using both cigarettes (34% vs. 26%) and e-cigarettes (48% vs. 39%) **at higher prevalence than their heterosexual peers.**

Ever Tobacco Use by Sexual Orientation



Current Tobacco Use by Sexual Orientation



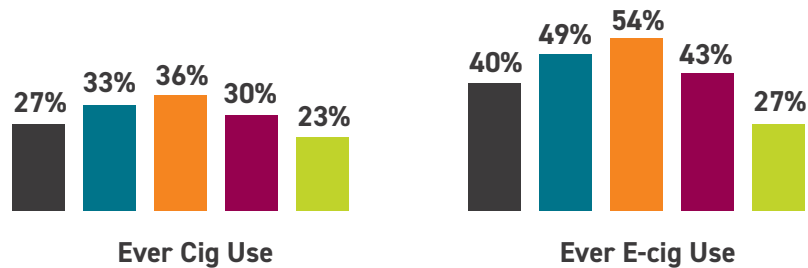
GENDER IDENTITY: HIGH PREVALENCE OF TOBACCO USE FOR TRANSGENDER AND NONBINARY YOUNG PEOPLE

Tobacco use patterns are similar among young people who do not identify as cisgender, including transgender and nonbinary young people. This group generally uses cigarettes and e-cigarettes at higher prevalence than their cisgender peers.

- > **Nonbinary young people have higher tobacco product use prevalence.**
 For example, nonbinary young people had the highest prevalence of ever using cigarettes (36% vs. 27%) and e-cigarettes (54% vs. 40%), and nearly twice as many nonbinary young people currently used cigarettes (11% vs. 6%) and e-cigarettes (17% vs. 14%) compared to cisgender peers.
- > **Transgender individuals also report higher ever use of cigarettes and e-cigarettes** (43% vs. 40%) compared with their cisgender peers.
- > **Overall, young people who are not cisgender report ever using cigarettes** (33% vs. 27%) **and e-cigarettes** (49% vs. 40%) **at higher prevalence than cisgender peers.**

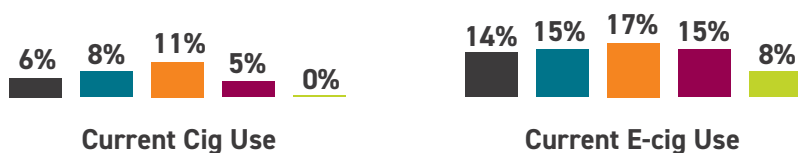
Ever Tobacco Use by Gender Identity

Cisgender
 Not Cisgender
 Nonbinary
 Transgender
 Another identity



Current Tobacco Use by Gender Identity

Cisgender
 Not Cisgender
 Nonbinary
 Transgender
 Another identity



THE LGBT+ COMMUNITY HAS LONG FACED HIGH EXPOSURE TO TOBACCO ADVERTISING

The tobacco industry has spent **decades capitalizing on LGBT+ individuals**, contributing to elevated tobacco use prevalence in the population. Historically, tobacco giant RJ Reynolds' infamous 1995 SubCulture Urban Marketing campaign, "Project SCUM," explicitly targeted LGBT+ populations in San Francisco's Castro District.³

More recently, tobacco companies have been leveraging social media to advertise e-cigarette products, and LGBT+ individuals are reporting significantly higher exposure to tobacco-related content on social media than their non-LGBT+ counterparts.⁴



HIGHER TOBACCO PRODUCT USE ATTRIBUTED TO GREATER STRESS

The new data confirm that tobacco use among LGBT+ individuals continues at a higher prevalence than their cisgender and heterosexual peers, a trend that researchers have noted since the early 2000s.^{4,9,10} Higher stress related to stigma, social disenfranchisement, and discrimination is a key factor in high tobacco use among this community, leading to higher product uptake and presenting barriers to quitting.^{5,11,12}

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Nicotine use and mental health

Young people in the U.S. are facing a mental health crisis. In 2021, the U.S. surgeon general issued an advisory noting that young people are facing unique challenges that are devastating to their mental health.¹³ Because research also shows that nicotine addiction can **intensify symptoms of depression and anxiety** and **increase stress levels**, tobacco product use among young people threatens to worsen the mental health crisis. Young people who identify as LGBT+ already face increased stress that could be compounded by tobacco use.

MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS ARE HIGH FOR THE LGBT+ COMMUNITY

Mental health among youth and young adults is understudied, however, we know that LGBT+ individuals experience worse mental health outcomes compared to their cisgender peers.¹⁴⁻¹⁶ According to Truth Initiative data, a significantly higher proportion of LGBT+ individuals reported a current diagnosis with a mental health disorder compared with those who are cisgender (44% vs. 20%). These mental health outcomes can be tied to stigma, social disenfranchisement, bullying, and discrimination.^{5,11,12,17}

Across the U.S., the introduction of bills that target the rights of LGBT+ individuals, particularly transgender and nonbinary people, has accelerated,⁸ exacerbating the existing stressors the community faces.¹⁸ Bills have been passed that restrict access to gender-affirming care, limit the ability to update ID documentation, and undermine non-discrimination laws.⁸

Seventy-one percent of LGBT+ youth have reported negative mental health impacts relating to state laws restricting their rights.¹⁹ Stress related to recent legislation can compound existing concerns, with the potential to exacerbate health inequities such as tobacco use among members of the LGBT+ community, particularly among transgender and nonbinary individuals whom this legislation affects disproportionately.

MORE PREVENTION EFFORTS, QUITTING SUPPORT, AND RESEARCH ON TOBACCO USE AMONG LGBT+ INDIVIDUALS ARE NEEDED

Persistently high prevalence of tobacco use among this population underscores the crucial need for prevention and intervention efforts specifically for LGBT+ young people. Truth Initiative recommends the following:

- **Representation in health education campaigns.** Because the LGBT+ community has higher exposure to tobacco advertising,⁴ public health education campaigns must work to counter this exposure.
- **Addressing mental health concerns when quitting.** LGBT+ young people could benefit from quitting support tailored to their needs. Quitting programs and interventions should explicitly address stress and mental health.
- **More nuanced research on tobacco use by sexual orientation and gender identity.** More survey research with accurate measurement of sexual orientation and gender identity is needed, particularly among young people. For example, many national surveillance surveys for young people don't include the option to identify as nonbinary, a population that may represent at least half of not-cisgender young people and who report high prevalence of tobacco use. It is also important to note that some states have passed legislation that restricts how school surveys ask about sex and gender.²⁰⁻²³ These policies will inhibit the ability to monitor, and in turn advocate for, the health and wellness of transgender and nonbinary young people.

Tobacco use is higher among LGBT+ individuals, in part due to targeted marketing and increased burden of stress.^{1,24} Support is needed for this population.



Persistently high prevalence of tobacco use among this population underscores the crucial need for prevention and intervention efforts specifically for LGBT+ young people.

Resources are available for those looking to quit

For those wanting to quit smoking, vaping nicotine, or using other tobacco products, there are resources to help.



TEENS AND YOUNG ADULTS CAN TEXT “DITCHVAPE” TO 88709 TO GET HELP QUITTING

A first-of-its-kind, free and anonymous text messaging program from **truth®** designed to help young people quit vaping has become a resource for over 700,000 young people.

The program incorporates messages from others in the same age group who have attempted to or successfully quit vaping nicotine. A [randomized clinical trial found](#) that young adults ages 18-24 who used the program had nearly 40% higher odds of quitting compared to a control group. A second clinical trial proved that the program is not only successful in helping young people quit vaping nicotine, but also in [ensuring that they don't later use combustible tobacco products](#) in place of e-cigarettes.

► [Want support quitting vaping? Sign up here.](#)



THE EX PROGRAM

Tobacco users of any age can access resources about quitting smoking, vaping nicotine, or any tobacco product with [EX Program](#). EX Program combines the scientific leadership in digital tobacco solutions from Truth Initiative with a proven treatment model from the Mayo Clinic, providing the personalized support tobacco users need to combat the behavioral, social, and physical aspects of addiction. The program also incorporates the longest running online community where current quitters and former tobacco users gather to support each other. It's a special place to get support, and research shows that people who follow the EX quit plan are four times more likely to quit.

► [Learn about EX Program](#)

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