

Letter to the editor

Dear Editor,

Alaskan youth smoke more and use more smokeless tobacco than youth in the Lower 48. As pediatrician and the Director of Public Health, this concerns me. It is frightening when we realize that despite our best efforts, more than eighty percent of Alaska's adult smokers

started when they were teenagers and that one out of five Alaskans die from

tobacco-related deaths. We need every tool available to stop teens from becoming hooked on one of the world's most addictive drugs (nicotine).

The State of Alaska Department of Health and Social Services already supports the passage of clean indoor air laws, the enforcement of youth access laws,

improved education and public awareness programs as ways to reduce tobacco use by teenagers.

We also believe increasing the price of tobacco is a tool which decreases youth consumption and in doing so, prevents teenage nicotine addiction.

Research shows that increasing

tobacco taxes is one of the most powerful weapons we have to reduce youth

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smoking. We have supported this claim in the past, and we will continue to do so. If we can achieve this goal, Alaska's youth can live longer and healthier lives and we can spend less on preventable tobacco-related illness in the future.

Dr. Peter Nakamura-Director
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