



# African American Leadership Forum

*Our voices. Our future.*

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## **African American Leadership Forum Recommendations concerning reducing the use of Menthol Tobacco in the African American Community**

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**Executive Summary:** AALF strongly urges investment in proven programs, and support policies that clearly focus on reducing health disparities within the black community. Historical trauma continues to impact the health of the African American community. Increasing funding and efforts that address persistent systematic racism, and implementing effective menthol educational and cessation programs are critically urged. AALF supports all local efforts towards protecting our youth from the exposure to the harms of tobacco, understanding that a statewide policy addressing the prevention of nicotine addiction is long overdue.

**Background:** AALF executed a two-year S.H.I.P. (State Health Improvement Program) Menthol Cigarette Intervention Grant (MCIG) to listen to and educate the African American community about the harms of menthol tobacco. Methods used included conducting pre education community surveys designed to understand issues, including demographics, causes for use or non use of tobacco products, and understanding current levels of knowledge and information concerning menthol as an additive to cigarettes. The survey results were provided back to the community through earned media and community-sponsored health events. We then returned to the community via the use of Change Agents (individuals from faith based, philanthropic, and community organizations employed by AALF) to educate community members concerning menthol tobacco, including, defining menthol, the health impact of menthol, the intentional predatory practices of Big Tobacco companies, and the willingness of community members to take action. We also surveyed participants about the relevance of the information, delivery methods, and attitudes about local policies.

Upon completion of the community education sessions, a post program survey was conducted, to determine if the education sessions were effective in changing attitudes about menthol. We also conducted pre-and post-program Key Informant interviews with 10 leaders who represented faith based, philanthropic, and community organizations to determine their perceptions of menthol usage in the community, and appropriate policy direction.

AALF's recommendations represent the feedback we received from our intentional interactions with the African American community members and Key Informants as described above.

**We recommend that state and local government, and MDH continue to acknowledge and call out structural racism in all policies which continue to prevent the implementation of strategies that address the cause and effect relationship of addiction to tobacco.** State and local government and MDH should lead the work relating to addressing the social determinants of health, including income and income distribution, education, unemployment and job security, employment and working conditions, business opportunities, early childhood development, food insecurity, housing, and social exclusion/inclusion. State and local government, and MDH should lead efforts supporting Health in All Policies at the legislative and local levels of government.

**We recommend that state and local government adopt policies that directly decrease access and exposure to tobacco products.** While policies limiting the sale of menthol and flavored tobacco products to people over the age of 21 and restricting sales to adult only stores, is a good first step, additional policies, including reducing the number and density of stores that sell tobacco products in certain geographic areas; and keeping the price of tobacco high through local actions such as prohibiting coupon redemption and setting minimum prices on non-premium cigars should be advanced. State and local government should, without hesitation, enact policies to support protecting young people by limiting exposure to second hand smoke, and quickly initiate or support scientific studies that prove the detrimental harms of e-cigarettes and supplies associated with the use of electronic delivery systems.

**We recommend that state and local government support the creation of culturally specific venues for improved cessation resources and expand the current Quit Plan model.** Research shows that the most effective tobacco prevention program is “never starting.” However, for people who are already addicted, tobacco cessation programs need to be based in the community and made publicly available, including free access to commercially available quit products, improved access to youth cessation programs, and readily available information that informs communities where to access peer oriented group support.

**We recommend that state and local government and the African American community implement concerted efforts towards educating the community about menthol tobacco, its harms, and intentional predatory practices used by the tobacco industry targeting underserved communities.** State and local government should provide required funding/resources to mobilize legacy community organizations (e.g. Minneapolis Urban League, NAACP, YWCA, et al.), faith based organizations, philanthropic and community based organizations (especially those with a youth engagement/young adult focus), community organizers, and local paid media outlets in order to deliver measurable positive health messages.

Jeffrey A. Hassan, Executive Director  
African American Leadership Forum

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jeffrey A. Hassan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

