



Highlights of [GAO-04-41](#), a report to the Honorable Bill Frist, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death in the United States. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that, on average, over 440,000 deaths and \$76 billion in medical expenditures were attributable to cigarette smoking each year from 1995 through 1999. Reducing tobacco-related deaths and the incidence of disease, along with the associated costs, represents a significant public health challenge for the federal government. Most adults who use tobacco started using it between the ages of 10 and 18. According to a Surgeon General's report, if children and adolescents can be prevented from using tobacco products before they become adults, they are likely to remain tobacco-free for the rest of their lives.

GAO was asked to provide information on federal efforts to prevent and reduce youth smoking. Specifically, this report describes (1) federal programs, research, and activities that aim to prevent and reduce tobacco use among youth, (2) the efforts of federal departments and agencies to monitor their programs, and (3) the coordination among federal departments and agencies in efforts to prevent and reduce tobacco use among youth.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-41.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Marjorie E. Kanof at (202) 512-7101.

TOBACCO USE AND PUBLIC HEALTH

Federal Efforts to Prevent and Reduce Tobacco Use among Youth

What GAO Found

Some federal programs, research, and activities that aim to address tobacco use among youth focus only on tobacco while others aim to address tobacco use as part of broader efforts to address unhealthy behaviors such as substance abuse and violence. Two federal programs within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) focus only on tobacco use. CDC's National Tobacco Control Program (NTCP) focuses on preventing and reducing tobacco use among the general population and explicitly targets youth. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's program to oversee implementation of a provision of federal law, commonly referred as the Synar Amendment, focuses only on tobacco use among youth. The Synar Amendment requires states to enact and enforce laws prohibiting the sale of tobacco products to minors. In addition to these tobacco-focused programs, HHS, and the Departments of Defense (DOD), Justice (DOJ), and Education sponsor programs that include tobacco use as part of broader efforts to address unhealthy behaviors among youth, such as substance abuse and violence. For example, Education's Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities program is designed to prevent substance abuse and violence. HHS agencies, such as the National Institutes of Health, conduct research on tobacco use and nicotine addiction among youth and its health effects on youth. HHS agencies and other federal departments also support activities to prevent and reduce tobacco use among youth, such as education and outreach efforts. HHS and its component agencies coordinate tobacco-related efforts with other federal, state, and local government agencies and nongovernmental entities.

Federal departments and agencies collect a variety of information to monitor how programs that aim to address tobacco use among youth are being implemented by grantees and the effectiveness of grantee efforts in meeting program goals. The information is collected through various means, including grant applications, progress reports, periodic site visits, and program evaluations. For example, to monitor NTCP, CDC requires states to submit biannual reports on the implementation of state NTCP-supported tobacco control programs. The information that federal departments and agencies collect on these programs is also used to provide training and technical assistance to grantees on topics such as conducting program evaluation.

In commenting on a draft of this report, HHS stated that the report was very informative but it did not include programs like Medicaid that are a substantial element of HHS tobacco prevention efforts. Including programs that finance health insurance such as Medicaid, however, was beyond the scope of our review. Also, HHS noted that we did not include information about the challenges other federal agencies face in coordinating tobacco-related issues but DOD, DOJ, and Education did not describe such challenges. DOD and DOJ had no comments on the report and HHS and Education provided technical comments that we incorporated as appropriate.