

# Raise the Age to 21

## Establish Tobacco Retailer Permitting System to Protect NC Youth



NC needs to raise its minimum age to purchase tobacco products to 21 to match the new federal age requirement passed in 2019.

- Many young people transition from experimental use to regular, daily use between the ages of 18 to 21.
- It's confusing to retailers and consumers to have separate ages for state and federal law.



MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS



HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

From 2011-2019, NC saw more than a **five-fold** increase in e-cigarette use among middle schoolers and a **ten-fold** increase among high school students. Young people addicted to nicotine struggle with concentration and impulse control, negatively impacting learning and behavior in school.



NC could lose over \$4 million in Substance Abuse Prevention and

**Treatment Block Grant** money

(money NC uses to pay for drug treatment, including opioid use disorder) through penalties under the federal Synar amendment if sales to youth are too high in required annual inspections. NC came very close to exceeding the Synar limit in 2019.



Over 40% of tobacco product purchase attempts by underage buyers resulted in sales

in January-February 2022 in ongoing data collection by East Carolina University in an eastern NC site of a multi-site National Institutes of Health study led by Rutgers University.

Most NC young people obtain their e-cigarettes from retailers. In



monitoring checks conducted as part of the state's settlement with JUUL in 2021, **57.7% of tobacco retailers did not check for ID**. We know that **the most important factor** in whether a retailer will sell tobacco to underage persons in NC is whether the retailer **asks purchasers for ID**. It is critical to enforce our tobacco sales laws to keep our youth safe.

**Permitting of tobacco retailers** will help us **preserve NC substance use treatment dollars** AND **protect our youth**.



- We don't currently have a complete list of who is selling tobacco; permitting will tell us exactly who is selling it.
- The ABC Commission can work with retailers to gain compliance with underage sales laws, levying fines and suspending permits if needed.

Tobacco retail permitting and inspections will also **benefit law-abiding retailers** by providing consequences for their competitors who flout the law.



The ABC Commission will implement a system so it is easy for retailers who already have an alcohol permit to add a tobacco permit, **reducing the burden on business while still protecting youth**.



40 States

Forty states (including TX, FL, AL, MS, GA) require licensing/

permitting of tobacco retailers as a tool to enforce their tobacco laws. NC needs this tool too.



NC DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

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*NC needs to raise its minimum age to purchase tobacco products from 18 to 21*