



Doctors for Change 2019 Policy Priorities

Improve Public Health Initiative in Texas

ABOUT DOCTORS FOR CHANGE

Doctors for Change is a member-based organization with over 1,500 participating health care providers, students, and medical residents throughout the Houston region. Our members, Board of Directors, and Leadership Team donate countless hours to make our organization run. The Board and Leadership team work closely with committees and our staff members to accomplish all of the work that we do. Doctors for Change works to increase access to care and improve the health of all Houstonians and all Texans through research, education, collaboration, and advocacy.

WHY PUBLIC HEALTH INITIATIVES

Tobacco use is the number 1 cause of preventable disease and premature death in Texas. ~28,000 Texans die from smoking every year, and Texas spends an estimated \$8.8 billion in annual direct health care costs attributable to tobacco use.

Nearly 3 million Texas adults smoke cigarettes, and most smokers (95%) started prior to the age of 21. Adolescent tobacco use leads to an increased risk of nicotine addiction. Continued use causes lung cancer, coronary heart disease, diabetes, other serious and costly chronic health conditions, and an early death.

We therefore recommend that Texas:

- Raise the minimum legal age for purchasing tobacco products to 21.
- Restore state funding for tobacco prevention and control programs and eliminate funding restrictions on statewide efforts to prevent tobacco usage.
- Reduce infant exposure to secondhand smoke (as this exposure increases the risk of a number of health problems like respiratory illnesses and sudden infant death syndrome).

Pertinent legislation:

- HB 252 (Farrar): Relating to increasing awareness of the dangers of exposing children to secondhand smoke. **Considered in Calendars on 3/27.**
- HB 749 (Zerwas): Relating to the distribution, possession, purchase, consumption, and receipt of cigarettes, e-cigarettes, and tobacco products. **Committee report sent to Calendars on 4/4.**
- SB 21 (Huffman): Relating to the distribution, possession, purchase, consumption, and receipt of cigarettes, e-cigarettes, and tobacco products. **Placed on intent calendar.**



While great progress has been made on the state level to keep children safe, more work remains to optimize child safety and injury prevention.

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading killer of children older than 1 year, yet state legislative efforts to improve child passenger safety standards have remained largely stalled in recent years. Missing from many state child passenger laws are requirements for safety seat to be rear-facing seats until age 2 years.

Pertinent legislation:

HB 448 (Turner, Chris): Relating to the creation of an offense for failing to secure certain children in a rear-facing child passenger safety seat system. **Considered in Calendars 3/13.**

SB 1524 (Zaffirini): Relating to the creation of an offense for failing to secure certain children in a rear-facing child passenger safety seat system. **Scheduled for a Public Hearing on 4/10 in Transportation.**