



The Use of Snus as a “Tobacco Harm Reduction” Product

A position statement demonstrating the harmful impact of SNUS on low SES populations

Introduction:

The Break Free Alliance is one of six national networks funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Office on Smoking and Health (OSH). The mission of the Break Free Alliance is to reduce the burden of tobacco use in low socioeconomic status (SES) communities. The Alliance is composed of state and national organizations serving low SES populations. This Position Statement was developed as a result of a joint effort to provide states and other organizations to facilitate communication on the issue of Snus, especially as a cessation tool.

Background Information on Snus:

Several U.S. tobacco companies are promoting the use of a form of tobacco known as *snus*. This form of tobacco traces its origins to Sweden, which is the only country in the European Union where its use is legal. Snus is a version of moist smokeless tobacco that is manufactured in small teabag-like pouches and placed in the mouth.

The manufacturers of domestic snus are optimistic that some people will view it as a relatively safe substitute for cigarettes—or as a means of maintaining the body’s demand for nicotine in circumstances where one cannot smoke, or prefers not to smoke. It is well known that some people do opt for smokeless tobacco products in those situations. In the case of snus, it is designed in such a way that its users do not need to spit, which could make the product more attractive to youth or to women.

Break Free Alliance Position on the Use of Snus:

The Break Free Alliance recognizes that there is **no** safe form of tobacco (even the tobacco industry acknowledges that). Hence, it strongly opposes the promotion and adoption of any initiative asserting that any form of tobacco is an acceptable substitute for conventional cigarettes, cigars, pipes, or spit tobacco. The Alliance finds that advocating “tobacco harm reduction” is neither an acceptable nor ethical public health practice. “Tobacco harm reduction” is the notion that use of a less deadly form of tobacco is acceptable for adults and children.

Public health concerns include the following:

- Snus will be viewed as a safe alternative to smoking.
- Snus is potentially a gateway to cigarette smoking for children.

- Some smokers will use snus when they cannot smoke, and thus become “dual-addicted” to an additional tobacco product with proven, known health risks.
- Some smokers may use snus as a means of smoking cessation, only to find that they are not able to quit snus use.
- Tobacco cessation is much more difficult for people who are dual addicted.
- All tobacco products are harmful to health and should not be promoted as a safe alternative to smoking.

The use of any or all tobacco products places low SES communities at greater risk for negative health outcomes. In accordance with its mission, the Break Free Alliance will continue to identify resources and advocate for the elimination of tobacco use, in any form, among populations of low socioeconomic status.

The tobacco industry does not promote “tobacco harm reduction” to the consumer. Rather, it promotes snus to consumers as a means to “enjoy” tobacco in places where smoking is not permitted. The message at least one company gives to public health practitioners is that we should join them in encouraging cigarette smokers to switch from smoking to snus. Aside from the small likelihood that smokers will do so, the Alliance’s position is that the public health community must reject any appeals to partner with the tobacco industry. Their goals to profit from the sales of tobacco are incompatible with goals of the public health community, and their long history of deceit is such that they cannot be trusted, especially in matters of health. Furthermore, the long-term health implications of snus use have not been established.

The prevalence of smoking is much higher among those with lower levels of education and lower incomes - a phenomenon that is partly due to tobacco industry marketing strategies. As an entity that addresses tobacco use and prevention among low-SES populations, the Break Free Alliance opposes any products that may further burden this population.

Conclusion:

The Break Free Alliance stands in opposition to the use of tobacco products in any form, even if some tobacco products are less deadly than smoking. “Tobacco harm reduction” is a marketing ploy of the industry that sells tobacco; it has no place in public health. Much research is needed in the US, since nothing is known about the long-term implications of snus. Its use may not be as benign as its producers would like us to believe. The Alliance recognizes that ALL tobacco products are harmful to health, and that all tobacco use causes disease and addiction.

In view of that fact, the Break Free Alliance agrees with many other health and prevention agencies in recommending that tobacco use be avoided and discontinued. Several non-tobacco methods have been shown to be effective for quitting cigarettes as well as other tobacco addictions. These methods include pharmacotherapy such as nicotine replacement therapy, proven cessation programs, individual and group counseling, and telephone or on-line tobacco cessation quitlines.