Executive Summary
May 2016

Smoking has long been known to lead to tobacco-related diseases and harmful health outcomes, including heightened risk of cancer, stroke, and heart disease. Decades of research and public health efforts through prevention programs, education, and regulation have contributed to widespread awareness of these health impacts and the larger societal costs caused by tobacco use. California, in particular, has been a leader in tobacco use reduction and cessation, as evidenced by the 50 percent reduction in adult smoking rates over the past twenty-five year span.

However, introduction of novel tobacco products that are offered in a variety of flavors designed to appeal to children; such as bubblegum, grape, and chocolate; may present new public health threats to adolescents and young adults and threaten the progress achieved in tobacco control. Snuff, hookah, and liquid nicotine solution are just a few of the substances on the market that contain tobacco and tobacco-derived nicotine, but are not subject to the same strict flavor restrictions as traditional cigarettes. Notably, these products are sold in a variety of flavors and bright packaging which, complemented by targeted advertisements, appeal to youth, certain ethnic minorities, and other priority populations.

This white paper was prepared by the California Medical Association (CMA) and reviewed by its Council on Science and Public Health, a panel of physician experts, with input from subject matter researchers. These findings provide insight into the increasing consumption of flavored and mentholated tobacco products, specifically with regards to priority populations, and the resulting health effects. The paper assesses existing data and research regarding tobacco use by priority population and the types of flavored tobacco products on the market.

“[Flavored tobacco products] are widely considered to be 'starter' products, establishing smoking habits that can lead to a lifetime of addiction.”
Food and Drug Administration, Flavored Tobacco Product Fact Sheet

Key Points:
• Consumption of flavored tobacco products such as cigars, smokeless tobacco, hookah tobacco, and liquid nicotine solution (used in electronic smoking devices) have increased among youth in recent years, while menthol cigarettes continue to corner a large part of the U.S. cigarette market.
• Flavorings used in tobacco products do not reduce the health impacts and risks associated with tobacco use, and are not safer than non-flavored tobacco products.
• Flavored and mentholated tobacco products are “starter” products that help new users establish daily habits and promote addiction to tobacco products, make it harder to quit, and may result in the concurrent use of multiple tobacco products.
• The tobacco industry has marketed these flavored and mentholated tobacco products to account for user preferences that skew younger, and reinforce sociocultural messages with priority populations.
• Strong evidence supports the finding that youth, certain racial/ethnic groups, and other targeted priority populations (i.e., LGBT and women) are particularly vulnerable to sweet flavors and menthol, and are largely driving this increased uptake and sustained use of flavored tobacco products.