

The Science of Tobacco, Vape, and Marijuana Use and Regulation



RTI International evaluates tobacco, vape, and marijuana prevalence, sales, regulation, behaviors, and perceptions in the Center for Health Policy Science and Tobacco Research (CHPSTR). We evaluate the effectiveness of national, state, and local tobacco control programs; perform rigorous evaluations of state- and national-level mass media campaigns; and conduct economic and other analyses to evaluate policy effects.

Overview

RTI is a recognized innovator in planning and implementing large-scale multidisciplinary evaluations of public health interventions and tobacco use prevention and control programs. Staff members in RTI's CHPSTR have extensive expertise in tobacco control evaluation at the national, state, and local levels. Our experts use approaches from economics, psychology, sociology, health communications, survey research, and program evaluation to find solutions to this pressing public health problem.

Research and Methodology

We apply a variety of methods as well as research techniques to study tobacco use; we also evaluate tobacco use prevention and control programs and media campaigns. Our approach includes engaging key stakeholders, understanding program goals, developing detailed evaluation plans, collecting and analyzing data, preparing recommendations, and disseminating findings. RTI works with novel data sources to evaluate use, beliefs, attitudes, and regulation of tobacco and related substances in the context of a technologically advanced culture, including fielding surveys and evaluating user input via social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter.

Evaluation Focus Areas

Federal, State, and Local Tobacco Control Programs. RTI combines quantitative and qualitative methods to demonstrate the impact of tobacco control programs on tobacco use and tobacco-related health outcomes.

Media Campaign Evaluations. We use focused, theory-driven media surveys that assess the target audience's awareness of, and reactions to, media messages, as well as the target audience's core attitudes, beliefs, intentions, and behaviors. We have pioneered innovative approaches to analyze digital and social media campaigns alongside more traditional advertising media.





Costs of Tobacco Use. Our health economists estimate the economic and health burdens of tobacco use. We quantify population-level health benefits generated by specific tobacco use interventions and estimate the associated costs and return on investment. Additionally, we use multivariate, multilevel, and longitudinal modeling of tobacco retail sales and pricing data to measure market activity.

Regulatory Research. RTI uses diverse approaches to advance regulatory science surrounding tobacco products, including studies examining public perceptions of tobacco products and their risks and how the public processes information disseminated about tobacco products. Where findings may inform decisions about policy enforcement and future regulations, we analyze retail sales data and conduct local opinion leader surveys, focus groups, and in-depth interviews to assess the impact of local and state tobacco policies. We evaluate the quality and strength of a policy relative to defined legal standards.



Trending Substances. RTI's researchers are on the forefront of studying other addictive substances and products associated with tobacco use, including marijuana and electronic cigarette products. We use conceptual models; identify and segment target audiences; pretest concepts, messages, and materials; and analyze population-based survey and sales data to create baseline measures that will pave the way for future understanding of these products.

Virtual Reality Technology. RTI creates and uses virtual reality technology to study the impact of retail advertising and product placement for tobacco and electronic cigarette products in convenience stores.



Project Highlights

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) Tips from Former Smokers Campaign \(2011–present\)](#)

The Tips campaign is the first federally funded national tobacco prevention campaign of its kind. RTI is conducting a multiyear, comprehensive evaluation of the Tips campaign to assess its audience reach and impact on smoking cessation behaviors and related knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs. This evaluation includes randomized trials of increased media doses and national studies to determine the association between increased doses of the campaign and changes in cessation behaviors. Our evaluation has documented the campaign's success in generating over 1.6 million new quit attempts and 100,000 sustained quits among U.S. smokers.

Marijuana Legalization in Colorado and Washington (2014–present)

RTI funds and conducts a national mail and online survey of 7,000 adults who have used marijuana in the past, present, or not at all. This survey will refine survey measures for states with legalized marijuana sales; allow for comparison between states; and provide insight on behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes around marijuana use and regulation. RTI previously conducted surveys in Colorado, Washington, and Oregon to explore a range of emerging issues related to drugged driving, consumption patterns, risk perceptions, and other important variables in the context of new retail markets for recreational marijuana. Results from these studies provide a range of policy-relevant data that may help policymakers craft appropriate policies to mitigate potential unintended consequences of marijuana legalization.



Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Center for Tobacco Products (2011–present)

Working for the FDA's Center for Tobacco Products, RTI has conducted a range of science-backed tobacco regulation, including qualitative studies, experimental studies, local tobacco control policy evaluations, and media campaign evaluations. RTI is currently evaluating several tobacco-focused public education campaigns including the following:

- *The Real Cost*, targeting youth ages 12 to 17 who are open to smoking or already experimenting with cigarettes
- *The Real Cost Smokeless*, targeting rural male youth ages 12 to 17 at risk for smokeless tobacco use
- *Fresh Empire*, targeting multicultural youth ages 12 to 17 who identify with hip hop culture
- *This Free Life*, targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) young adults ages 18 to 24.

CDC, Office on Smoking and Health (OSH) (2012–present)

RTI works with CDC OSH to develop and implement a tobacco control infrastructure measurement protocol and to support other evaluation-related initiatives for the National Tobacco Control Program. This project will assist OSH in creating guidance materials on key outcome indicators related to the goal of identifying and eliminating tobacco-related disparities. RTI also conducts national- and state-level surveillance of tobacco and electronic cigarette sales and prices to establish trends in consumption and to investigate the effects of tobacco regulations and policies on sales, prices, and promotions.

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), Culture of Health Sentinel Community Surveillance (2015–present)

RTI is partnering with RWJF to conduct a naturalistic, longitudinal surveillance study in 30 U.S. communities to monitor trends in indicators aligned with RWJF’s Culture of Health Action Framework. This effort is designed to identify and change the root causes of health inequities and increase public health on a substantial scale.



Independent Evaluation of the New York State Bureau of Tobacco Control (2003–present)

RTI designed this comprehensive evaluation plan and surveillance system. As a result, we have evaluated the impact of key program and policy interventions, including assessing the health and economic impacts of the 2003 smoke-free air law, the effect of cigarette excise taxes on smoking behaviors and cigarette tax evasion, and the influence of emotionally evocative media messages on smoking cessation. We recently conducted studies to assess program progress on increasing tobacco cessation intervention in the health care setting and supported the program’s focus on “next generation” tobacco control policies targeted at reducing youth exposure to tobacco product marketing in the retail environment.

More Information

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