



**Oxiris Barbot, MD**  
*Commissioner*

**Gotham Center**  
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Dear Fellow New Yorker:

Tobacco use is a public health crisis New York City (NYC) has battled for many years. Despite our progress in reducing adult and youth cigarette smoking rates over the last decade, a new generation of youth are at risk for developing lifelong nicotine dependence.

Although youth use of traditional cigarettes declined to 5 percent in 2017, more and more youth turn to other tobacco products, including cigars and smokeless tobacco, as well as electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes). In fact, in 2017, an alarming 17 percent of NYC public high school students reported using an e-cigarette in the past month. Almost all of these products contain nicotine, which is addictive, especially for teens.

In the past, tobacco companies used flavors (including menthol) to hook young people on cigarettes. Today, flavors continue to be used in other tobacco products and e-cigarettes to appeal to youth. Companies aggressively market these products in thousands of varieties, including many designed to look and taste like candy.

Among U.S. youth who had ever tried an e-cigarette, 81 percent said their first product was flavored.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, among NYC students who smoke cigarettes, almost two-thirds started with menthol or another flavored tobacco product.

The Defeat Flavors and End Nicotine Dependence (DEFEND) toolkit contains resources and strategies to help your community raise awareness and resist the dangers of menthol and other flavored tobacco and vaping products. Below are steps I hope your organization will consider:

- **Collect and share** personal stories with your community about how these products harm young people.
- **Host events** to educate youth and young adults on the dangers of these products and targeted industry marketing.
- **Become a health advocate** by sharing information on posters, social media platforms, newsletters or websites.

By partnering with communities like yours, the NYC Health Department can help prevent another generation of New Yorkers from becoming hooked on nicotine.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Oxiris Barbot MD".

Oxiris Barbot, MD  
Commissioner  
New York City Department of  
Health and Mental Hygiene

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<sup>1</sup> Ambrose BK, Day HR, Rostron B, et al. Flavored tobacco product use among US youth aged 12-17 years, 2013-2014. *JAMA*. 2015;314(17):1871-1873. doi:10.1001/jama.2015.13802.