

## Jamie Plume

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**From:** Megan Tucker <Megan.Tucker@heart.org>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, March 24, 2026 10:40 AM  
**To:** Senate Finance  
**Subject:** S. 3131 - Written Testimony  
**Attachments:** 2026 SB 3131 - American Heart Association Testimony.pdf; AHA 101 on Oral Nicotine Pouches.pdf; AHA The Truth About Nicotine and Cardiovascular Disease Infographic.pdf

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

Good morning,

Attached please find written testimony (with two attachments) submitted on behalf of the American Heart Association in opposition to S. 3131, which will be heard this evening.

Thank you,  
Megan



**Megan Tucker**

Region Sr. Director, Field Advocacy

**American Heart Association**

O +1 (401) 228-2331 | M +1 (401) 824-4818



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**American  
Heart  
Association.**

March 24, 2026

The Honorable Louis DiPalma  
Senate Committee on Finance  
Rhode Island General Assembly  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

**SUBJECT: Opposition to Senate Bill 3131**

Dear Chair DiPalma and Members of the Committee:

The American Heart Association thanks the committee for the opportunity to submit testimony in **opposition** to S. 3131, AN ACT RELATING TO TAXATION -- CIGARETTE, OTHER TOBACCO PRODUCTS, AND ELECTRONIC NICOTINE-DELIVERY SYSTEM PRODUCTS. This misguided proposal would create a new definition of “alternative nicotine product” as any noncombustible product without tobacco leaf but with nicotine from another source and cut/cap the tax on alternative nicotine products at \$2.00 per container up to 20 units.

The American Heart Association is the nation’s oldest and largest voluntary organization dedicated to fighting heart disease and stroke. Heart disease is the No. 1 killer worldwide, and stroke ranks second globally. Even when those conditions don’t result in death, they cause disability and diminish quality of life. We want to see a world free of cardiovascular diseases and stroke. Our mission is to be a relentless force for a world of longer, healthier lives.

The American Heart Association opposes attempts to decrease existing tobacco taxes for specific products. **The tobacco industry is deliberately misusing and misconstruing the concept of “harm reduction” to downplay risk and normalize nicotine use—particularly among youth and young adults—while continuing to profit from addiction and tobacco-related disease. We do not want to allow industry to increase their profits while addicting the next generation.** Tobacco tax increases are one of the most evidence-based policy approaches to reducing uptake, especially in youth and young adults, and helping existing users quit.

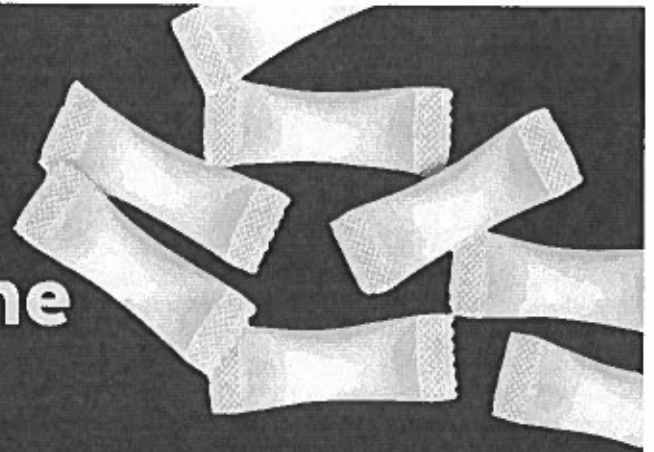
Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Megan Tucker  
Region Senior Director, Field Advocacy  
American Heart Association  
megan.tucker@heart.org

*Attachments: American Heart Association – 101 on Oral Nicotine Pouches  
American Heart Association – The Truth About Nicotine and Cardiovascular Disease*

# 101 on Oral Nicotine Pouches



Oral nicotine pouches are small, smokeless tobacco products that contain nicotine powder, flavorings and other chemicals. They are placed between the lip and gum, and the nicotine powder dissolves, releasing nicotine into the bloodstream through the lining of the mouth.

## Insufficient Safety Data

These products are relatively new to the market, lack long-term data on health effects, and contain harmful toxins.

To date, 20 varieties of Zyn pouches have received marketing authorization from the FDA and can be legally sold in the U.S. Other tobacco companies are selling products without FDA authorization, meaning most nicotine pouches are being sold illegally.



## Not Approved as Cessation Aid

The FDA has not approved these products to help people quit tobacco, and nicotine pouches have not been scientifically shown to help people who smoke cigarettes, quit.

The safety and effectiveness of oral nicotine pouches as a harm reduction approach or quit therapy have not been established, but on the basis of the FDA authorization of reduced risk for certain snus products, it is likely that nicotine pouches that contain fewer toxicants have the potential to reduce tobacco-related harm if someone who uses combustible cigarettes switches **completely** and not used in combination with other tobacco products.

## Dual Use and Addiction

**Most users do not quit tobacco** or switch completely to oral nicotine pouches; they **use both** pouches and conventional cigarettes, maintaining nicotine dependence.

**Any nicotine use by youth is a problem.**

Nicotine can have a profound and long-lasting effect on the adolescent brain, including negatively affecting:

- executive function
- impulse control
- attention span
- working memory
- learning

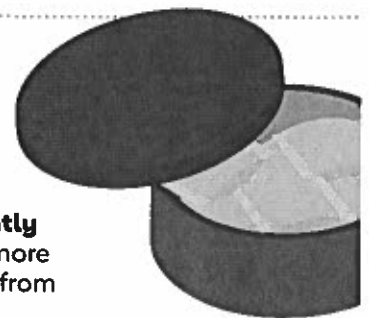


## Youth Risk

In 2024...

# 480,000

**Middle and high school students** reported **currently using** nicotine pouches, more than double the number from 2021<sup>2</sup>



**Adolescents are more susceptible to nicotine addiction even at low doses**, which makes the higher doses in newer tobacco products even more concerning. Studies have suggested that nicotine alters fear and anxiety responses, and contributes to the development, maintenance and recurrence of anxiety disorders.



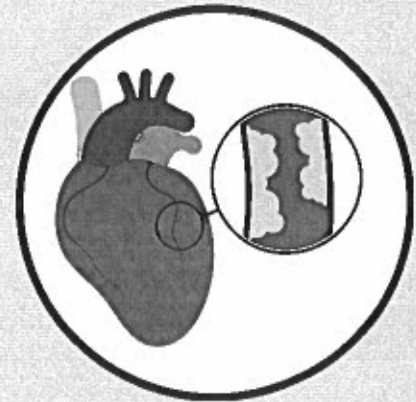


## Nicotine Harms

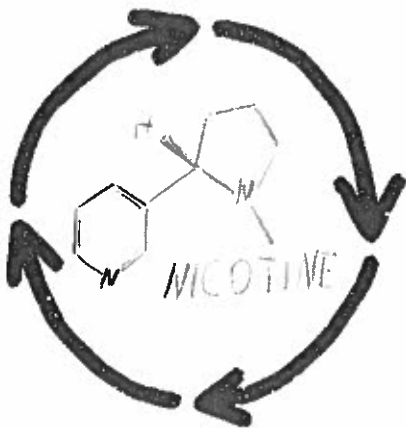
**Nicotine pouches deliver similar amounts of nicotine as combustible cigarettes. Nicotine raises the risk of cardiovascular disease, including heart attack and stroke.**

Nicotine is highly addictive and has serious effects on the body. It increases blood pressure, raises heart rate and narrows arteries, putting extra strain on the heart. Over time, it can contribute to hardened arteries, which increases the risk of heart attacks and strokes.

Additionally, some nicotine pouches contain even higher levels of nicotine than combustible cigarettes, making them even more addictive. Nicotine pouches may present less risk. They do still expose users to harmful and potentially harmful constituents.



## The nicotine addiction cycle



Nicotine follows the same **destructive addiction cycles** as other harmful addictive products. Nicotine may temporarily induce stimulation and pleasure and reduce stress and anxiety and may temporarily improve concentration, reaction time and performance of certain tasks, especially for adults.

However, as nicotine leaves the system, numerous **withdrawal symptoms** - including irritability, depressed mood, restlessness, anxiety, problems getting along with friends and family, difficulty concentrating, increased hunger and eating, insomnia and craving for nicotine - arrive. The symptoms are alleviated once nicotine is again used, feeding the addiction cycle. With continued use, a person **builds up a tolerance** requiring **higher nicotine content** or **more frequent use** to experience the same physical and mental effects. Over time, tolerance to this new dosage occurs, requiring another increase in the substance use.

This cycle of addiction is especially concerning for **young people**. Many who use tobacco mistakenly believe tobacco products can relieve stress or anxiety. However, once the cycle of withdrawal symptoms start, the user feels temporary relief if they consume nicotine again. This gives a **false sense that nicotine relieves stress and anxiety when it is actually the cause.**

**Join the American Heart Association as we work to end nicotine addiction.  
Text HEART to 46839 or visit [www.HeartPowered.org](http://www.HeartPowered.org)**



American Heart Association.

# The truth about... Nicotine and Cardiovascular Disease

The American Heart Association is committed to ending addiction to all commercial tobacco and nicotine products. To reach that goal, **we need to minimize the use of all combustible tobacco products and ensure e-cigarettes** and other newer products do not addict a new generation to nicotine. Oral nicotine pouches and heat-not-burn products represent an additional threat according to an American Heart Association policy statement published in December 2024.

## Nicotine is a highly addictive chemical that can harm heart and brain health.



Nicotine can **elevate blood pressure and heart rate**, forcing the heart to work harder. Over time, damage from high blood pressure can lead to **chronic conditions**, including **heart attack, stroke and heart failure**.



Nicotine can cause a **narrowing of blood vessels, or vasoconstriction**, which **limits the flow of oxygen-rich blood** throughout the body.



Nicotine contributes to **peripheral artery disease (PAD)** and **increases blood clotting**, which can cause **coronary artery disease, heart attack and stroke**. Left untreated, PAD can lead to **gangrene and amputation**.



- 1 Nicotine may **temporarily** induce stimulation and pleasure and reduce stress and anxiety. It may also **temporarily** improve concentration, reaction time and performance of certain tasks, particularly for adults.
- 2 As nicotine leaves the system, numerous withdrawal symptoms - including **irritability, depressed mood, restlessness, anxiety, problems getting along with friends and family, difficulty concentrating, increased hunger and eating, insomnia and craving for nicotine** - arrive.
- 3 The symptoms are alleviated once nicotine is again used, **feeding the addiction cycle**.



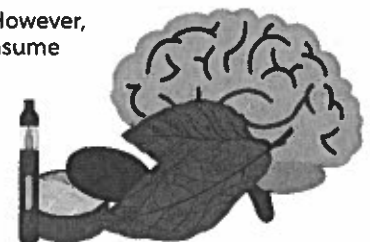
With continued use, a person builds a tolerance requiring higher nicotine content or more frequent use to experience the same physical and mental effects. Over time, tolerance to this new dosage occurs, requiring another increase in the substance use.

## Nicotine and the adolescent brain:

Nicotine can have a **profound and long-lasting effect on the adolescent brain**, including negatively affecting executive function, impulse control, attention span, working memory and learning. Adolescents are more susceptible to nicotine addiction even at low doses, which makes the higher doses in newer tobacco products even more concerning.

Many who use tobacco mistakenly believe tobacco products can relieve stress or anxiety. However, once the cycle of withdrawal symptoms starts, the person feels temporary relief if they consume nicotine again. **This gives a false sense that nicotine relieves stress and anxiety when it is actually the cause.**

Studies have suggested that nicotine alters fear and anxiety responses, and contributes to the development, maintenance and recurrence of anxiety disorders.



## Nicotine during and after pregnancy

Nicotine and other chemicals in tobacco products can significantly harm a child, both before and after birth. Tobacco use is always dangerous, but using tobacco during pregnancy puts their life and the unborn child at risk:



A **higher risk of miscarriage and ectopic pregnancy.**



**2x more likely to experience abnormal bleeding** during pregnancy and delivery.



Heart disease during pregnancy can create a **higher lifetime risk of heart disease** after delivery and heart disease is the **leading killer of new moms.**



**Slows fetal development and can cause low birth weight,** even in full-term pregnancies.

### Can cause premature birth, which can lead to:



**Difficulty feeding**



**Breathing challenges** that can last into childhood and adolescence



Increased risk of the **brain damage** that causes cerebral palsy



**Hearing and eyesight problems**



Developmental delays, including **obstacles to gaining language, thinking and movement skills**



A greater chance of having **physical birth defects** such as cleft lip, cleft palate or both



**Elevated odds of dying** from sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)

## The role of nicotine replacement therapy in cessation:

**Some nicotine products have been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) as smoking cessation products.** These products are **scientifically developed** to help people **reduce their nicotine intake** and ultimately **quit nicotine entirely** through a process known as nicotine replacement therapy (NRT). They have also gone through rigorous testing and approval by the FDA. These products provide controlled, low doses of nicotine in a way that reduces dependence over time. **This is in stark contrast to e-cigarettes and nicotine pouches, which are designed to keep the people who use these products addicted by delivering nicotine in highly efficient ways.**

Additionally, NRT has undergone rigorous clinical trials to provide scientific evidence that it is an effective tool for quitting nicotine altogether. E-cigarettes and nicotine pouches have been given a pathway to demonstrate that they help people quit, yet manufacturers have chosen not to pursue this route. Instead of proving their products support cessation, they continue to market them in ways that encourage lifelong addiction and poly-use (use of two or more nicotine products).