

Strengthening Youth Leadership in Tobacco Prevention: Interview with Donnell Bratton

Donnell Bratton - AMA project staff as well as the Racial and Health Equity (RHE) Committee Member under Minnesotans for a Smoke-Free Generation (MSFG)

ST. PAUL, MN, UNITED STATES, May 27, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Preface: As the Minnesota State Legislature wraps up its session, Minnesotans for a Smoke-Free Generation (MSFG) has renewed its statewide efforts to combat the rapidly rising youth vaping rates. One highlight of this initiative was the "Youth Voices for Tobacco Prevention" exhibition at the Minnesota State Capitol, supported by local youth. The event showcased personal stories from young people about the harmful effects of flavored tobacco. This article features an

interview with MSFG member Donnell Bratton, who played a key role in the exhibition and leads the "We Win the Game" media campaign. Through the conversation, Donnell shares his insights on engaging youth in tobacco prevention efforts as part of this critical initiative.

Donnell brought 14 youth to represent RHE, giving many their first opportunity to experience the Capitol. They observed presentations, witnessed protests for various causes, and saw firsthand how others advocated for their communities. 'It was great for them to see how others were advocating for their causes,' he said.

Rising Trend: How Flavored Tobacco Is Reaching Younger Youth

Donnell emphasized that flavored tobacco and vaping are major issues among youth, particularly because they are small, easy to hide, and don't have a strong smell, making them difficult to detect in schools. Through conversations with young people, he learned that peer



pressure plays a big role, with even younger youth—as early as 7th and 8th grade—being introduced to these products. “It’s not just older teens using them; younger kids are being approached and actively participating,” he noted. The tobacco industry has made these products look cool and appealing, making it easier for youth to access and use them without getting caught.

Protecting Youth: The Challenge of Stopping Targeted Tobacco Marketing
Youth tobacco prevention faces significant challenges, particularly in communities of color, where targeted advertising and easy access make it

harder to keep young people away from smoking and vaping. Donnell highlighted how local corner stores and smoke shops in marginalized neighborhoods frequently sell these products, making them easily accessible. He also pointed to the issue of couponing, where older teens take advantage of “buy one, get one free” deals or discounts, then resell or share tobacco products with their peers. “It’s not just about access—the industry is actively targeting these communities, making it even more difficult to keep youth away from smoking and vaping,” he said.

Strengthening Youth Voices: The Key to Tobacco Prevention

According to Donnell, two key actions are essential to better protect youth from tobacco. First, advertising and couponing must be restricted, especially in how they target young people. “Flavored tobacco ads should be limited, and discount deals that make it easier for teens to access these products need to be cut down,” he emphasized. Without these restrictions, the industry will continue to expose youth to harmful products while communities struggle with a lack of resources to promote anti-smoking campaigns effectively.

Second, on a personal and community level, youth voices need to be empowered. He stressed the importance of self-advocacy, where young people can speak up for themselves and their peers. “As adults, we can sometimes take up space in conversations where youth should be speaking,” he noted. He believes in creating youth-led advocacy groups to help them develop the confidence and skills to share their experiences and push for change. “If we can find ways to give more power to young people—through resources, financial support, and training—the impact would be incredible,” he said. This is why he saw the youth presence at the exhibition as so powerful, proving that their voices can make a real difference.



In addition to his work with RHE, Donnell is also actively involved in AMA's We Win the Game initiative, a campaign focused on reducing flavored tobacco use among youth. As part of this effort, AMA and its partners are preparing for the 2025 Minnesota legislative session by raising awareness in BIPOC communities about the harms of flavored tobacco. The initiative works with young Pan-Asian and Pan-African athletes to create culturally relevant messages that encourage choosing sports over smoking. Donnell also shared that RHE and AMA will collaborate on a social media campaign with local multicultural sports clubs, recognizing that these athletes serve as powerful role models with the ability to influence their peers. With the slogan "We win the game by choosing sports, not smoking," the campaign empowers youth to lead the way in building healthier, tobacco-free communities.

Donnell's insights shed light on the urgent need to address the rise of flavored tobacco use among youth, particularly in communities of color. His work emphasizes the power of youth-led advocacy and the importance of culturally relevant strategies like We Win the Game to drive real change. As AMA continues to champion tobacco prevention through education, outreach, and community partnerships, it remains committed to amplifying youth voices and advancing policies that protect future generations. To learn more and stay updated on this work, visit AMA's Project SUPPORT page: <https://ballequity.amamedia.org/project-support/>

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