

WNY Center for Research on Flavored Tobacco Products (CRoFT)

Institution: Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center

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Research Project 4: Evaluating effects of packaging and market availability of flavored tobacco products on consumer perception and behavior

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Project 4 Abstract:

Flavored products influence appeal, use, and perceptions of reduced harm; this is especially true in tobacco products in part because flavorings are often used to disguise bitterness and harshness of smoke and chemicals. Studies have suggested that these same misperceptions are detected among users of novel flavored tobacco products including electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS). In addition to flavors, descriptor terms (such as 'light' and 'ultralight') have been used by the tobacco industry for decades to communicate lower risk from certain products compared to other products. This project will investigate how descriptor terms such as 'natural', 'cherry gummy bear', 'Neapolitan ice cream', and 'chocolate milk shake' and pictures illustrating those terms influence perceptions of appeal, harm, and intention to use, among both current and susceptible non-users of ENDS. The overarching theme of this TCORS is to examine the effects of flavors in tobacco, with the end goal of developing a scientific framework for evaluating the potential effects of flavors on all tobacco product users. The overall premise of this proposed project is that packaging and labeling of flavored tobacco and ENDS products influence consumers' perceptions of appeal and beliefs of harm from using those products, and that those pack characteristics and perceptions influence their demand for that product. The goal of this project is to evaluate perceptions of flavored tobacco products and relevant messages as conveyed by package design characteristics (i.e., colors, design, descriptor terms), as well as the potential impact on demand and behavior, for cigarettes and non-cigarette tobacco products (including cigarillos/little cigars and ENDS). This project addresses several key questions within the Behavior and Communications domains as identified in RFA-OD-17-006 and aims to understand consumers' responses to product labeling around flavors. Through extensive qualitative work we will be able to address the specific FDA question regarding understanding the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to tobacco product use. With a mall-intercept survey experiment, we propose to explore the impact of product characteristics, including flavors, packaging, and labeling, on perceptions and beliefs, as well as refine methods for communicating complex scientific concepts of tobacco and ENDS products. Through an experimental auction study, we will examine the impact of potential FDA regulatory actions, such as banning characterizing flavors in combustible tobacco products, on beliefs, behavior, and demand of tobacco products and ENDS. This study expands the evidence-base of what users of flavored tobacco products believe about their products and the flavors of the products they use, as well as explores how they perceive flavor-specific pack characteristics. Finally, this study will simulate a realistic environment to assess demand of alternate flavored and unflavored products in a market where the preferred flavored combustible tobacco product is no longer available.