

## **Examining the Effects of Advertising, Packaging and Labeling on Perceptions, Use and Exposure of Combustible Tobacco Products**

Institution: University of Pennsylvania

1 U54 CA229973-01

### **Project 2: The effects of advertising and correctives for reduced harm tobacco products**

PI: Cappella, Joseph N.; University of Pennsylvania

#### Project 2 Abstract:

Project 2 develops correctives for the next generation of “reduced harm” combustible tobacco products (Modified Risk Tobacco Products -- MRTPs). The history of reduced harm tobacco products is one of outright deception and false inferences by consumers. As a new generation of MRTPs becomes more widely available, the possibility of misperception arises once again despite strong regulatory oversight by the FDA.

Project 2 develops scientifically rigorous protocols to establish the magnitude and strength of inaccurate beliefs created by advertising and marketing practices for MRTPs in target audiences. While studies of the health consequences of MRTPs is crucial to regulating their use and to informing the public, inferences made by consumers are often unpredictable but nonetheless may still be predictive of attitudes toward use and intentions to try the products. When such perceptions are misleading, produced by advertising content, and causally predictive of outcomes, they identify themselves as addressable targets in corrective communications.

The studies proposed in project 2 focus on advertising claims about combustible MRTPs identifying the beliefs affected by such claims – both harms and benefits – in the minds of both likely users (that is smokers) and one class of non-users (former smokers). Studies also examine whether these beliefs are causally related to outcomes using standard statistical mediation criteria and other, newer methods – so-called encouragement designs – to build an empirical base to shore up the statistical case of mediation.

With strong causal evidence for the ad-to-belief-to-outcome causal sequence, the specific beliefs implicated become the targets for corrective communications and warnings. Communications to correct misleading beliefs are developed and tested in contexts using covert and overt cognitive measures and in subsequent studies using biobehavioral measures of visual attention and smoking behavior. Warnings that focus on beliefs identified as causally linked to advertising content and as predictors of attitudinal, intentional, and behavioral outcomes should be effective communications because their targets are well-selected to minimize false beliefs that are derived from the belief systems of members of the target audience.

The goal of project 2 is to foster informed consumer decision-making about MRTPs. It would be a disservice to the public to encourage the use of MRTPs for the wrong reasons anchored in misinformation even if these products are relatively less risky than other tobacco products. Current FDA procedures for authorization of MRTPs require information from vendors about the ad content being proposed for the specific product and the warnings anticipated. This content needs to be assessed carefully and independently using cutting-edge methods to fully determine the impact of such advertising on beliefs about MRTPs both overtly and covertly. The research proposed advances the regulatory goals of the FDA with regard to combustible MRTPs by advancing cutting edge techniques to generate, design and test correctives for these new products.