

23rd CLEARING THE AIR IN COMMUNITIES OF COLOR CONFERENCE

FROM VISION TO VICTORY:

MOBILIZING ACTION *for a* TOBACCO-FREE ARKANSAS

TUESDAY

**MARCH 10
2026**

PROGRAM BOOKLET



March 10, 2026

Dear Participants,

On behalf of the Minority Initiative Sub-Recipient Grant Office at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, we are delighted to welcome you to the 23rd Annual Clearing the Air in Communities of Color Conference. This year's theme, "From Vision to Victory: Mobilizing Action for a Tobacco Free Arkansas," highlights the importance of our collective efforts in building a tobacco-free future for all Arkansans.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to each of you for joining us. Your commitment to learning, sharing, and applying new knowledge is vital to making a difference in our local communities. We hope that the insights and strategies discussed during this conference will empower you to create meaningful change and improve the health outcomes in your communities.

Thank you for being a part of this important event. Let's work together to clear the air and build a healthier future for all.

Sincerely,

Marian S. Evans

Marian S. Evans, DrPH, TTS
Coordinator
Minority Initiative Sub-Recipient Grant Office

DAY 1

TUESDAY, MARCH 10, 2026

9:00 a.m. - 9:05 a.m.	<p>WELCOME REMARKS Marian S Evans, DrPH, Project Coordinator, Minority Initiative Sub-Recipient Grant Office (MISRGO)</p> <p>INTRODUCTION OF FACILITATOR Ruthie Johnson, Project Specialist, Minority Initiative Sub-Recipient Grant Office <i>Summit Facilitator: Ms. Kenya Eddings, Executive Director, Arkansas Minority Health Commission</i></p>
9:05 a.m. - 9:10 a.m.	<p>WELCOME REMARKS AND REFLECTION Ms. Kenya Eddings</p>
9:10 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.	<p>KEYNOTES Unity In Action: Advancing Partnerships and Capacities to Combat Menthol Disparities Shelia Williamson, DNP, CRNA, Project Director, Making It Count Development Corporation</p>
10:05 a.m. - 10:45 a.m.	<p>Emerging Tobacco Products & Addiction: Preventing and Reducing Tobacco Use and Addiction Dr. Samia Amin, Assistant Professor of Public Health, Southern Arkansas University (Magnolia)</p>
10:45 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.	BREAK
11:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.	<p>CALLING OUT THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY'S TARGETING OF THE BLACK COMMUNITY AND COMMUNITIES OF COLOR Research Efforts to Look at Tobacco Use and Abuse on College Campuses Eric Batch, National Vice President, Advocacy Outreach and Partnerships; American Heart Association Ryon Everidge, Spokesperson, American Heart Association</p>
12:30 p.m. - 12:45 p.m.	BREAK
12:45 p.m. - 1:30 p.m.	<p>CLOSING SPEAKER A Personal Story From A Former Smoker Perry Campbell, Citizen/Community Advocate Dwight Pridgeon, Re-Entry Coordinator, City of Little Rock <i>Facilitator: Katherine Donald, Executive Director, Coalition for a Tobacco Free Arkansas</i></p>
1:30 p.m. - 1:45 p.m.	WRAP-UP AND EVALUATION

Planning Committee

Dr. Calvin Johnson
Director
MISRGO

Patricia Edwards
Project Specialist-Outreach
MISRGO

Earnette Sullivan
Program Manager
Minority Research Center on
Tobacco & Addictions

Trena Mitchell
Executive Director
Arkansas Cancer Coalition

Dr. Marian Evans
Project Coordinator
MISRGO

Carmelo Abraham
Accountant
MISRGO

Katherine Donald
Executive Director
Coalition for a Tobacco Free
Arkansas

Miriam Karanja
Director of Programs
Arkansas Cancer Coalition

Dr. Cynthia Troutman
Interim Program Director
Assistant Professor
Graduate Addiction Studies
Program

Connie Robinson
Administrative Specialist
MISRGO

Linder Conley (Retired)
Former Executive Director
Future Builders, Inc.

Session Descriptions

Conference Facilitator: Ms. Kenya Eddings, Executive Director, Arkansas Minority Health Commission

OPENING KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Unity In Action: Advancing Partnerships and Capacities to Combat Menthol Disparities

Sheila Williamson, DNP, CRNA, Project Director, Making It Count Development Corporation

OBJECTIVES:

1. Understand how communities of color continue to deal with health-related disparities as it relates to menthol flavored tobacco products.
2. Understand how the tobacco industry continues to target communities of color with menthol flavored tobacco products.
3. Understand actions that can be taken to reduce disparities as it relates to minority use of tobacco.

Minority Research Center on Tobacco and Addictions

Dr. Samia Amin, Assistant Professor of Public Health, Southern Arkansas University (Magnolia)

OBJECTIVES:

1. Discuss how the burden of combustible tobacco use in the United States remains high, especially in vulnerable populations.
2. Understand there's growing momentum for "endgame" policies, aiming to end tobacco use entirely, supported by public interest in policies like menthol bans or eliminating all tobacco sales.
3. List current emerging tobacco products.

PANEL DISCUSSION

Calling Out the Tobacco Industry's Targeting of the Black Community and Communities of Color

Eric Batch, National Vice President, Advocacy Outreach and Partnerships; American Heart Association

Ryon Everidge, Spokesperson, American Heart Association

OBJECTIVES:

1. Understand how spoken word empowers youth and adults to express their experiences with tobacco, turning their insights into art that promotes self-expression, critical thinking, and local activism.
2. Share why smoking rates remain higher among specific subpopulations, including African Americans.
3. Recognize how advertising, price promotions, retail, and point-of-sale advertising are target tactics for Big Tobacco.

CLOSING PANEL DISCUSSION

A Personal Story From A Former Smoker

Perry Campbell, Citizen/Community Advocate

Dwight Pridgeon, Re-Entry Coordinator, City of Little Rock

Facilitator: Katherine Donald, Executive Director, Coalition for a Tobacco Free Arkansas

1. Understand the common withdrawals that come with quitting smoking;
2. Recognize how Quitlines can assist smokers in quitting;
3. Understand the many resources that are available to current and former smokers

SPEAKERS



SHEILA WILLIAMSON

Dr. Sheila Williamson, a Clinical Professor at the University of Detroit Mercy and practicing CRNA at Henry Ford Health, seamlessly integrates academic rigor with firsthand clinical expertise. This dual role enables her to translate innovative research into practical interventions that enhance both bedside care and population health outcomes. Her work as a researcher and program director demonstrates an exceptional capacity to design and implement innovative healthcare initiatives that connect clinical initiatives that connect clinical precision with community relevance. By uniting evidence-based clinical strategies where they are strategies with grassroots engagement, Dr. Williamson drives measurable improvements in individual patient care while creating lasting, system-wide health benefits.



DR. SAMIA AMIN

Dr. Samia Amin is a pediatric haemato-oncologist by clinical practice and a public health researcher by training with over a decade of experience teaching clinical epidemiology and health informatics. Throughout her clinical career she has been deeply engaged in primary care, preventive health, and community health promotion. Dr. Amin's research portfolio centers on nicotine product use, addiction science, and cancer epidemiology. Her tobacco research focuses on e-cigarettes, oral nicotine pouches and tobacco informatics, with an emphasis on the behavioral, social, and informational determinants of non-combustible tobacco and nicotine product use.



ERIC BATCH

Eric Batch is the National Vice President of Advocacy Outreach and Partnerships for the American Heart Association (AHA). He previously served as Vice President of Field Advocacy for the Western Region, where he led advocacy efforts across 10 states, managing legislative campaigns and policy initiatives. With a proven track record in policy development, Eric has successfully driven legislative advancements in tobacco control, healthcare access, physical activity, nutrition, and cardiovascular health. Eric is also an Adjunct Professor at the University of Southern California, where he has taught graduate-level leadership courses in the Sol Price School of Public Policy. He holds a Master of Public Policy from USC and a Bachelor's degree in Political Science from Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas.

SPEAKERS



RYON EVERIDGE

In the spring of 2021, the American Heart Association Commissioned Actor, Rapper and Spoken Word Artist Ryon Everidge to create the original spoken word piece: "How Long Will You Target Me." The piece focuses on flavored tobacco and how the tobacco industry targets the Black Community (and communities of color) with menthol. Ryon has since created two additional original spoken word pieces for the American Heart Association. He is truly on the front lines of this work. He is also a Youth Pastor and Basketball Coach. In addition to his professional work, Ryon is an actor, rapper, spoken word artist, athlete, musician, and just all-around good guy.



PERRY CAMPBELL

Perry Campbell is a native of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He relocated to Little Rock, Arkansas, in 2015 and began his career with the City of Little Rock, where he serves as an Automotive Technician II with Little Rock Fleet Services—a position he has held for ten years. A devoted husband, father, and grandfather, Perry brings the same steadiness and commitment to his family life that he brings to his work. Perry began smoking cigarettes as a teenager and continued the habit into adulthood. In November 2016, he made a public pledge to go smokefree for 24 hours during the Great American Smoke Out, an event hosted by the Coalition for a Tobacco Free Arkansas.



DWIGHT PRIDGEON

Dwight Pridgeon is the City of Little Rock Reentry Coordinator. Dwight started his career with the City of Little Rock in May 2007 as the Neighborhood Resource Specialist. He began working with justice impacted individuals seeking second chance employment, housing and education in September 2021. Formerly incarcerated residents in the City of Little Rock with felony convictions can contact the reentry office to schedule an appointment for an assessment to assist with job placement, career training, life skill courses, voter rights restoration, expungement, and housing. Dwight is a member of National Reentry Association for Professionals, National Forum for Black Public Administrators and Vice President for Neighborhoods USA (NUSA).

FACILITATORS



MARIAN S. EVANS, DrPh

Marian S. Evans is the Program Coordinator for the Minority Initiative Sub-Recipient Grant Office and the Interim Director of the Minority Research Center on Tobacco and Addictions at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff. She holds a Master of Public Health Degree from Tulane University in New Orleans, LA and a Doctorate in Public Health from the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences in Little Rock, AR. She has over 25 years in community based program planning and implementation, capacity building, program evaluation and policy development. Dr. Evans has extensive grant writing and grant evaluation experience and manages over \$2 million dollars in grant funding. She recently became a certified Tobacco Treat Specialist through the MD Anderson training program. Her research interests are policy and community public health development in minority and rural communities.



RUTHIE M. JOHNSON, MA, BS

Ruthie M. Johnson currently works as Project Program Specialist/Program Monitor for the Minority Initiative Sub-Recipient Grant Office (MISRGO) at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB). She has held this position since 2003 and has garnered an even greater love for the fight against tobacco. Prior to this position she worked in the School of Business and Management for 18 years as a Program Manager for the Mid-South Delta Consortium funded through the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Ms. Johnson holds a BS in Business Education and MA in Management and Leadership. A long time employee of UAPB (37 years), she is a Certified Grants Specialist (CGS), Certified Grants Evaluator (CGE), Tobacco Treatment Specialist (TTS), Abstract Reviewer (10+ years) for the American Public Health Association (APHA) and continues to serve on the Arkansas Tobacco Control Advisory Board.



KENYA EDDINGS

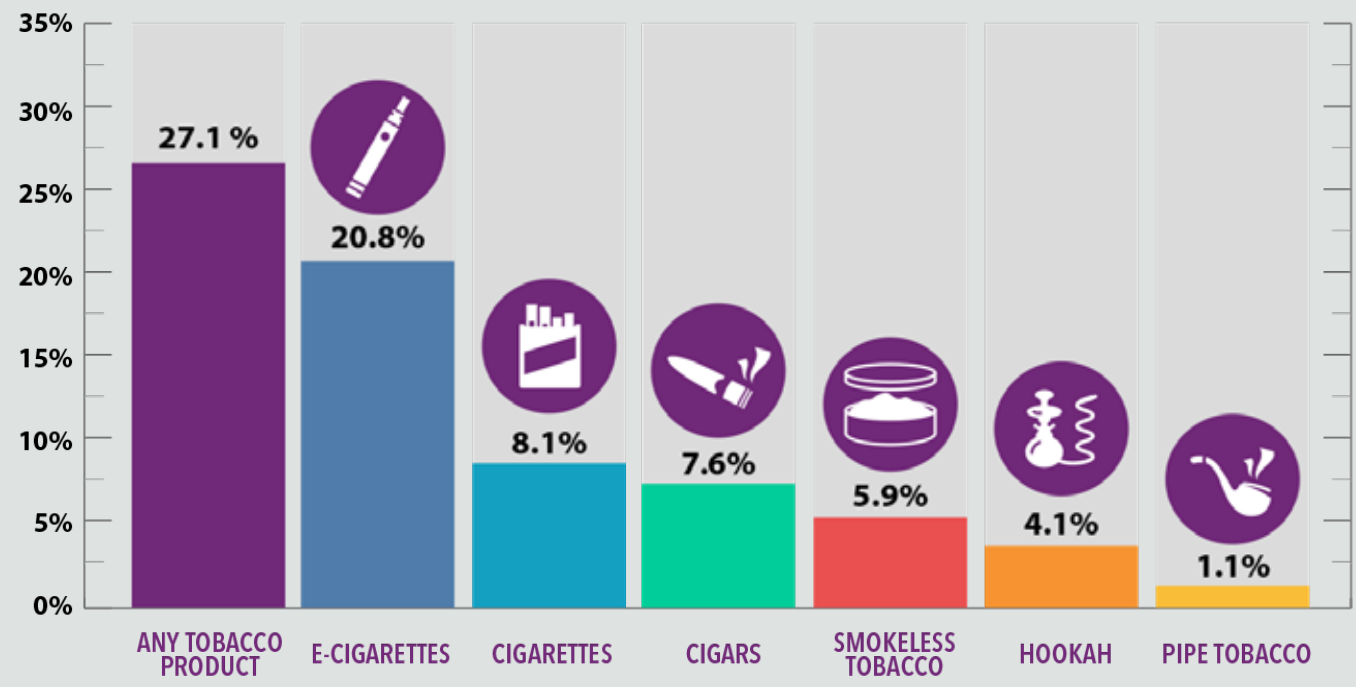
Kenya L. Eddings, a native of Little Rock, Arkansas is the executive director of the Arkansas Minority Health Commission (AMHC). She received her Bachelor of Science degree in Biology with a minor Chemistry and African-American Literature from Tuskegee University in Tuskegee, Alabama and Master of Public Health from Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Kenya is humbled to have been appointed Vice-Chair of Governor Asa Hutchinson's Food Desert Work Group and to the City of Little Rock's Food Desert Task Force. She is a member of Delta Omega Public Health Honor Society, Leadership Greater Little Rock Class XXIII, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., and served on various civic/community boards including the Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts (formerly Arkansas Arts Center), Junior League of Little Rock, Quapaw Quarter Association, and ACANSA. Kenya is the co-founder with Garbo Hearne, founder of Hearne Fine Art, of Kuumba Arts Collective, an art appreciation group for young professionals of color and is the founder of Today's Communiqué, a web-based and social media platform designed to promote experiences and opportunities with a specific emphasis on communities of color that empower, educate, and entertain in central Arkansas and beyond.

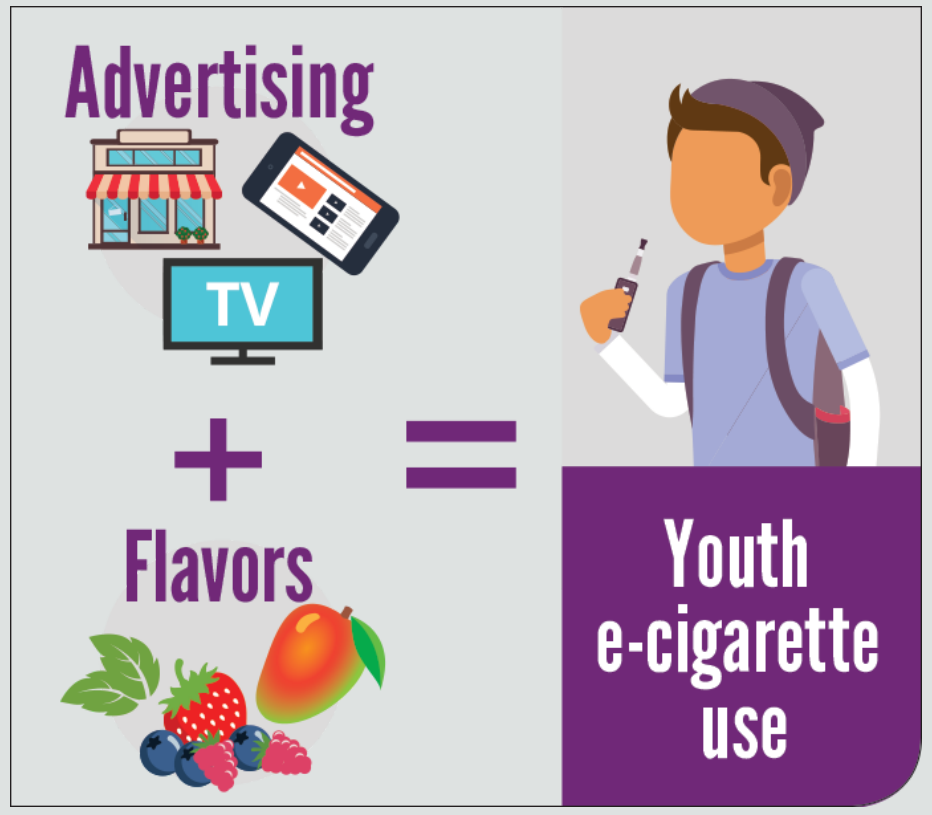
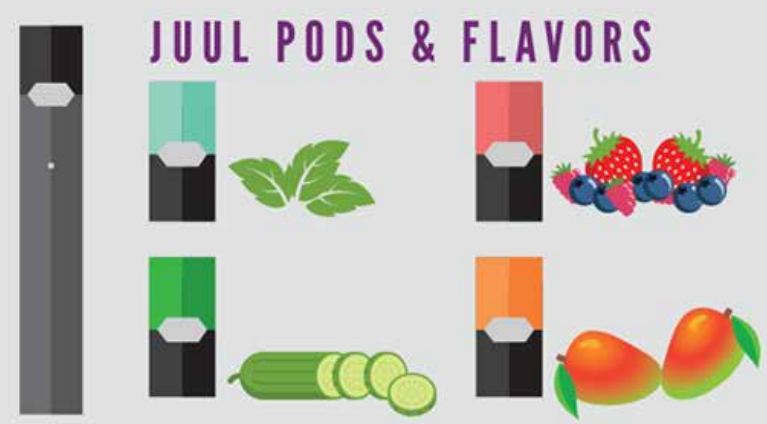


KATHERINE DONALD

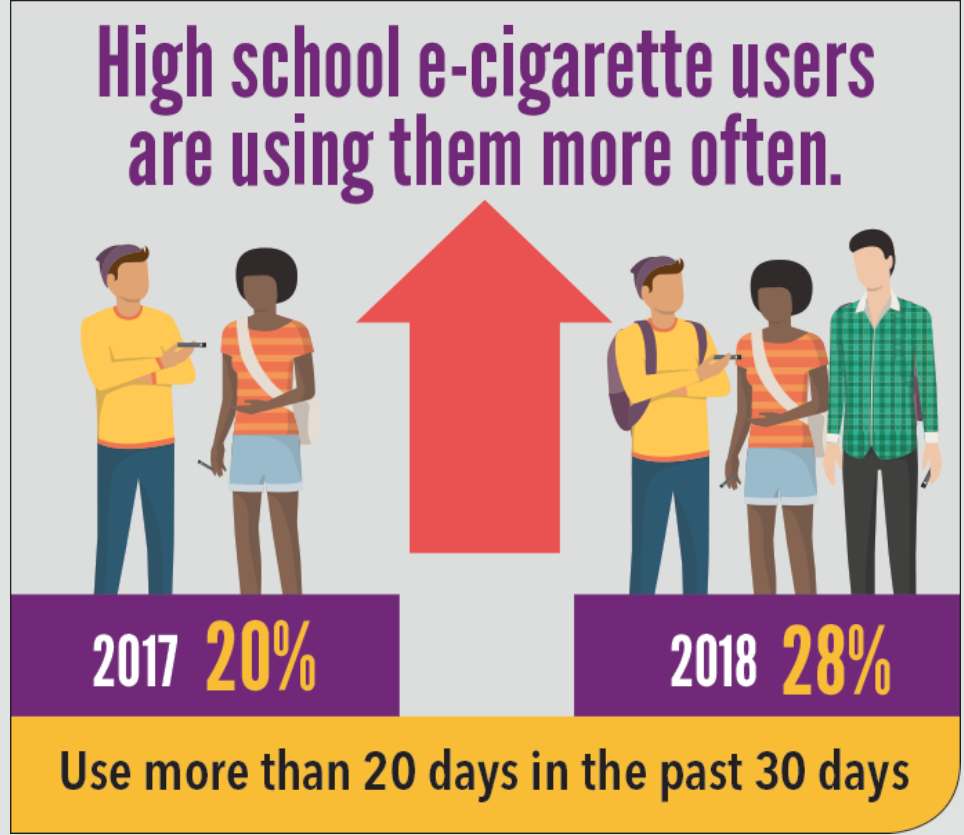
Arkansas for more than twenty (20) years. She has been instrumental in assisting in the passage of several statewide and local tobacco control laws, and numerous voluntary policies that help to protect the public from exposure to secondhand smoke in places where they live, work, learn, worship, and play. Katherine received her first degree from Philander Smith College, in Little Rock, Arkansas, and continued her education through graduate studies in Rehabilitation Education at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.



SOURCE: Tobacco Product Use Among Middle and High School Students – United States, 2011-2018. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR), February 2019.



SOURCE: Tobacco Product Use Among Middle and High School Students – United States, 2011-2018. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR), February 2019.



NOTES

More than 85% of youth who currently use e-cigarettes or nicotine pouches **report using flavored products.**



Source: National Youth Tobacco Survey, 2024

Why do youth vape?

Advertising



Flavors



Social influences



Nicotine



[CDC.gov/Vaping](https://www.cdc.gov/Vaping)

