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Health Organizations Call on The Walt Disney Company to Terminate Vice Media Partnership with Philip Morris International

Deal puts youth at risk and undermines Disney's commitment to reducing youth tobacco use and exposure to smoking imagery

WASHINGTON, D.C. (April 25, 2019) – A coalition of eight national and international health organizations today urged The Walt Disney Company (Disney) to require its partner network, Vice, to terminate its relationship with Philip Morris International, the world's largest manufacturer and seller of cigarettes.

Disney, a prominent stakeholder, has invested more than \$400 million in Vice and reportedly owns more than 10% of the company. The health organizations are asking Disney to require that Vice adopt a strict policy prohibiting the company and its subsidiaries from working with tobacco companies. Second, the groups want Disney to require Vice to make all tobacco-related business relationships public, including a detailed description of all tobacco-related marketing activities.

Vice's existing partnership with Philip Morris International undermines the strong anti-tobacco stance taken by Disney and its commitment to protecting youth from tobacco and smoke exposure, according to the health organizations.

"We are confident that Disney, which has been a leader in reducing youth exposure to tobacco use in entertainment, would not want to be associated with a company actively supporting the tobacco industry," the [letter from the health organizations states](#). "We hope you will use your influence as a shareholder and as a respected public company to encourage Vice to cease working for an industry whose major product is projected to kill a billion people worldwide this century."

The groups that have signed on to the appeal include: Truth Initiative®, American Cancer Society, American Heart Association, American Lung Association, Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, The Union (International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease), the American Academy of Pediatrics and Vital Strategies.

The Financial Times recently reported on a [\\$6.5 million deal between Vice and Phillip Morris International](#) to produce sponsored content endorsing e-cigarettes. Vice and Phillip Morris International have disputed the details of the arrangement and claim it will not promote vaping,

but they have acknowledged that Vice is accepting funding from Phillip Morris International to create a media platform.

The prospect of a media platform with the presumed intent to promote e-cigarettes and smoking products is deeply troubling to national health organizations. In 2018, the U.S. surgeon general declared e-cigarette use among youth a public health epidemic. Recent data show that in 2018, 20.8% of U.S. high school students used e-cigarettes in the last 30 days. Further, young people who use e-cigarettes are four times more likely to progress to cigarette smoking compared to their peers who do not use e-cigarettes.

Largely considered a leader in reducing youth exposure to tobacco, Disney has long been committed to addressing tobacco in its youth-rated (i.e., G/PG/PG-13) movies. In 2016, Disney was the only company of the six major movie companies who belong to the Motion Picture Association of America who had zero tobacco incidents per movie. Further, Disney recently banned smoking at its Florida and California theme parks.

“The game plan seems clear: continue the pipeline of nicotine addiction to preserve profits and markets even if the new users are kids,” the organizations write in their letter. “Vice appears to be committed to continuing to be an industry shill.”

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