Research supports that smoking tobacco damages genetic material found in egg and sperm cells. Miscarriage and birth-defect rates are more frequent amongst the babies of women who smoke. Black children and adults are more likely to be exposed to secondhand smoke than any other racial or ethnic group. Secondhand smoke increases the risk of infertility, ectopic pregnancy, spontaneous abortion, and stillbirth. These damaging effects and death tolls are more prominent among Black women.

Compared with women who are nonsmokers, women who smoke cigarettes have more significant risks of reproductive health problems, many forms of gynecologic cancer and other types of cancer, coronary and vascular disease, chronic obstructive lung disease (COPD), and osteoporosis.

Similarly, compared to nonsmokers, e-cigarette users without a history of smoking are 74 percent more likely to have asthma. E-cigarette users with a history of smoking are three times more likely to have COPD. Lung cancer is the second most common cancer in African American men and women, and it is the leading cause of cancer death. African Americans have the highest tobacco-related cancer rates among racial and ethnic groups and are more likely to die because of the disease.
Tobacco is a major contributor to three of the leading causes of death among Black Americans – heart disease, cancer and stroke – and Black Americans die from these conditions at far higher rates than other Americans. Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer deaths in the Black community, and most lung cancer is caused by smoking.

Due to the disproportionate effect of tobacco usage in the African American community, especially among Black women, BWHI is raising awareness and calling for urgent action to reduce the tobacco/vaping threat in communities of color.

BWHI supports and recommends increased lung cancer prevention efforts accessible and culturally appropriate for Black women and girls, including the expansion of teen education programs and smoking and vaping cessation services. BWHI supports increased access to affordable screening for individuals at high risk due to its potential to dramatically improve lung cancer survival rates by finding the disease at an earlier, more treatable stage. BWHI also supports funding for more research into the unique ways social determinants such as poverty and environmental stress impact Black women and contribute to high lung cancer rates.

Menthol in cigarettes leads to greater initiation of smoking among youth, makes it harder to quit smoking and has a disproportionate adverse impact on the health of Black Americans.

BWHI supports …

- Prohibiting the sale of flavored tobacco products, including menthol cigarettes.
- Urging the FDA to remove cigarettes that have menthol as a characterizing flavor
- Legislation that bolsters lung health and curtails youth tobacco use
- The Stopping Appealing Flavors in E-Cigarettes for Kids (SAFE Kids) Act – which prohibits flavors in non-cigarette tobacco products (does not cover menthol cigarettes) and sets criteria for authorizing a flavor e-cigarette.
- That cigarette packages carry color labeling depicting negative health consequences of smoking;
- Expanding coverage of evidence-based tobacco cessation services in Medicaid and CHIP.
- Prohibiting the online retail sale of tobacco products including e-cigarettes
- Public education regarding tobacco regulation, the harms associated with tobacco use, and grants on tobacco cessation
- Outreach to medically underserved communities for tobacco use prevention and cessation