

Tobacco Harm Reduction 101

Rhode Island 2025

Lawmakers are often bombarded with misinformation on the products used by adults in their state. This annual analysis provides up-to-date data on the adults who use cigarettes and e-cigarette products in the Ocean State. This information also includes data on youth use, impacts of e-cigarettes and analyses of existing tobacco monies.

Key Points:

- In 2023, 84,752 Rhode Island adults (9.5 percent) were currently smoking. This is a 19.5 percent decrease from 2022 and represents 20,041 fewer adults smoking.
- Among all smoking adults in Rhode Island in 2023, 3 percent were 18 to 24 years old, 35 percent were 25 to 44 years old, 40.3 percent were 45 to 64 years old, and 21.7 percent were 65 years or older.
- Among all adults earning \$25,000 or less in 2023, 20.4 percent were currently smoking compared to 5.2 percent of adults earning \$50,000 or more.
- Among all smoking adults in Rhode Island in 2023, 78.3 percent were White, 10.1 percent were Hispanic, 7 percent were Multiracial, 1.6 percent were Black, 1.6 percent were adults identifying as “Other,” and 1.3 percent were Asian.
- In 2023, 60,664 Rhode Island adults (6.8 percent) were currently using e-cigarettes. This is a 1.5 percent increase from 2022 and represents 1,163 additional adults vaping.
- Among all vaping adults in Rhode Island in 2023, 32 percent were 18 to 24 years old, 48.5 percent were 25 to 44 years old, 15.9 percent were 45 to 64 years old and 3.7 percent were 65 years or older.
- In 2023, for every one Rhode Island high school student who was smoking, more than 62 adults were currently using cigarettes.
- In 2023, for every one Rhode Island high school student who was vaping, more than eight adults were currently using e-cigarettes.
- The introduction of e-cigarettes has not led to increases in cigarette smoking, but rather, correlates with significant declines in smoking rates among young adults.
- Between 2007 and 2023, smoking rates among Rhode Island adults aged 18 to 24 years old decreased by 83.1 percent.
- E-cigarette use has decreased among Rhode Island young adults. Between 2022 and 2023, e-cigarette use among 18- to 24-year-olds decreased by 2.8 percent.
- Cigarette excise taxes in Rhode Island disproportionately impact low income and low education persons, while failing to significantly reduce smoking rates among that class.
- Among Rhode Island adults earning \$25,000 or less, smoking rates decreased on average by 0.8 percent annually between 2003 and 2023, while rates among adults earning \$50,000 or more decreased by 5 percent during the same period.
- In 2023, low-income adults were 3.9 times more likely to smoke than high income earners.
- In 2023, among Rhode Island adults who did not graduate high school, 16.4 percent were currently smoking, while only 4 percent of college graduates were smoking.
- In 2023, adults lacking a high school diploma were 4.1 times more likely to smoke than college graduates.
- Rhode Island woefully underfunds programs to prevent youth use of tobacco and/or vapor products and help adults quit smoking, while simultaneously receiving millions of dollars from the pockets of the adults who smoke. In 2023, for every \$1 the state received in tobacco monies, it spent less than \$0.01 on tobacco control efforts.

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Adult Combustible & E-Cigarette Use

In 2023, according to data from the annual Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System survey, conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an estimated 84,752 adults (or 9.5 percent of Rhode Islanders) were currently smoking. This is a 19.5 percent decrease from 2022 when 11.8 percent reported current cigarette use. There were 20,041 fewer adults smoking in 2023 compared to 2022.

In 2023 (among all Rhode Island adults), 2.3 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds, 10.7 percent of 25–44-year-olds, 12.5 percent of 45–64-year-olds, and 8.3 percent of adults aged 65 years or older were currently smoking combustible cigarettes. Among all smoking adults in 2023, 3 percent were 18 to 24 years old, 35 percent were 25 to 44 years old, 40.3 percent were 45 to 64 years old, and 21.7 percent were 65 years or older.

Between 2022 and 2023, smoking rates among 18- to 24-year-olds decreased by 46.5 percent, among 25–44-year-olds by 23.7 percent, among 45–64-year-olds by 18.4 percent, and among adults aged 65 years or older by 1.2 percent.

Among all adults earning \$25,000 annually or less in 2023, 20.4 percent reported currently smoking, compared to 5.2 percent of adults who earned \$50,000 or more per year. Low-income adults were 3.9 times more likely to smoke.

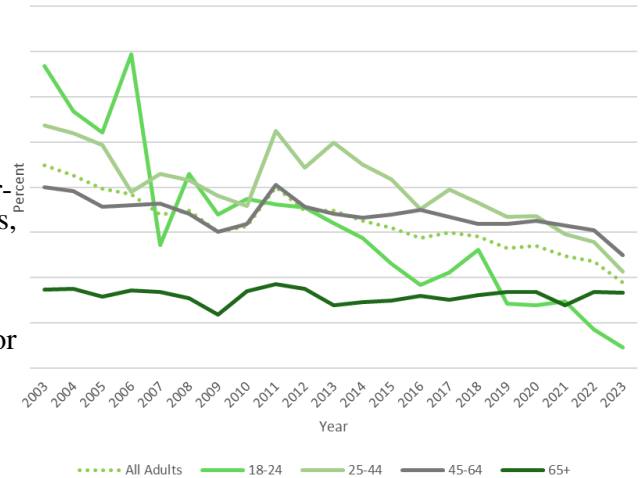
In Rhode Island, Multiracial (non-Hispanic) adults reported smoking at a greater percentage of their identified race at 13.8 percent. This is compared to 10.6 percent of adults identifying as “Other,” 10.1 percent of White adults, 7.5 percent of Hispanic adults, 6.3 percent of Black adults, and 3.6 percent of Asian adults.

Yet, White adults made up a significantly larger percentage of Rhode Island’s total adult smoking population. In 2023, White adults accounted for 78.3 percent of the Ocean’s state current smoking population, compared to Multiracial adults, who made up 7 percent. Hispanic adults accounted for 10.1 percent, Black adults made up 1.6 percent, adults identifying as “Other,” accounted for 1.6 percent, and Asian adults made up 1.3 percent of Rhode Island’s adult smoking population in 2023.

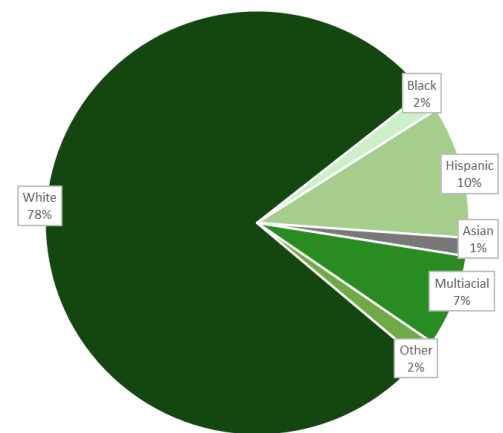
In 2023, an estimated 60,664 Rhode Island adults (or 6.8 percent) were currently using e-cigarettes. This is a 1.5 percent increase from 2022 when 6.7 percent reported current e-cigarette use. There were an estimated 1,163 additional adults vaping in 2023 compared to 2022. There has been a 51.1 percent increase in adults vaping between 2016 and 2023. Further, there were an additional 22,476 Rhode Island adults vaping in 2023 compared to 2016.

Among Rhode Island adults currently using e-cigarettes in 2023, 32 percent were 18 to 24 years old, 48.5 percent were 25 to 44 years old, 15.9 percent were 45 to 64 years old and 3.7 percent were 65 years or older. Among adult e-cigarette users in Rhode Island in 2023, 68 percent were 25 years or older.

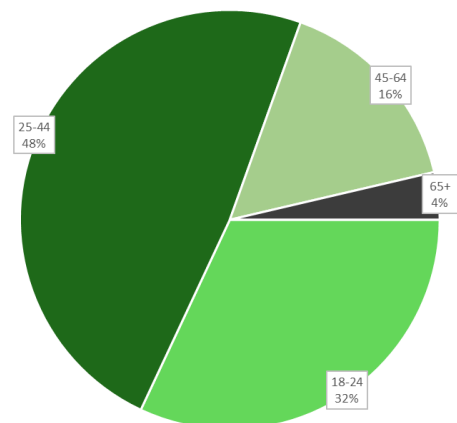
Adult Smoking Rates by Age
Rhode Island



Percent of Adults Who Smoke, by Race
Rhode Island 2023



Percent of Adults Who Vape, by Age
Rhode Island 2023



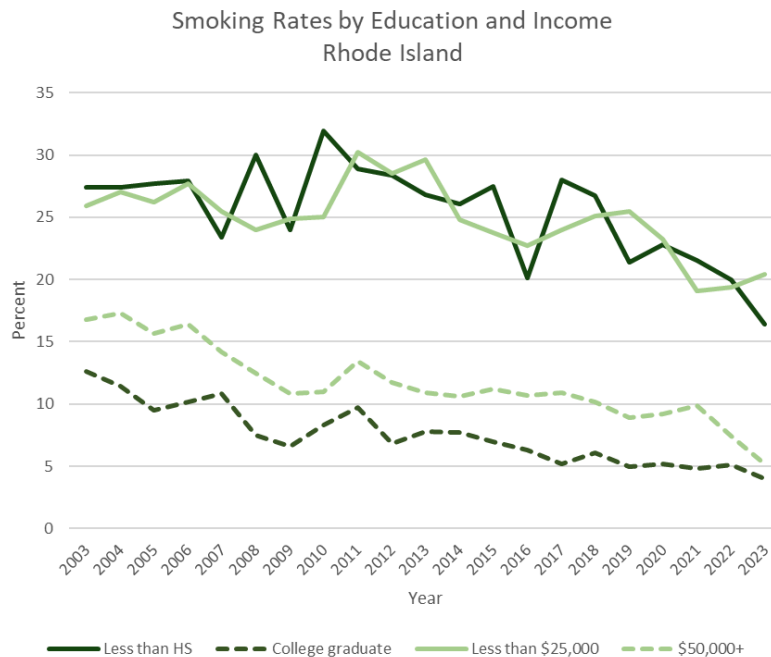
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Youth Combustible Cigarette and E-Cigarette Use

Youth smoking rates are at historic lows in the Ocean State. In 2023, 11.9 percent of high school students reported ever trying combustible cigarettes, while 3.1 percent reported currently smoking, or having used the product on at least one occasion in the 30 days prior. In 2023, approximately 1,358 Rhode Island high school students were smoking, compared to an estimated 84,752 Rhode Island adults aged 18 and over who were currently smoking. For every one high schooler smoking in 2023 in Rhode Island, more than 62 adults were currently smoking.

Youth vaping continues to decline in the Ocean State. In 2023, 32.4 percent of Rhode Island high school students reported ever using an e-cigarette, and 16.5 percent reported current use. Between 2019 and 2023, ever-use of e-cigarettes decreased by 33.7 percent, while current use declined by 45.2 percent. In 2023, approximately 7,227 Rhode Island high school students were vaping, compared to 60,664 Rhode Island adults aged 18 and over who were currently vaping. For every one high schooler vaping in 2023 in Rhode Island, more than eight adults were using e-cigarettes.





Youth to Adult Smoking Ratio Rhode Island 2023



Youth to Adult Vaping Ratio Rhode Island 2023



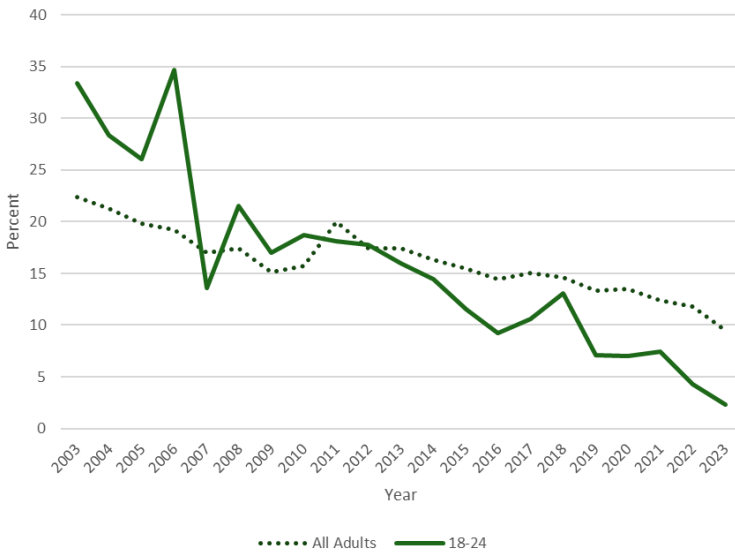
Key

-  = High School Student
-  = Adult

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Young Adult Smoking Rates
Rhode Island



Young Adult Cigarette Use

The introduction of e-cigarettes has not led to increases in young adult cigarette smoking, but rather, correlates with significant declines.

E-cigarettes first entered the U.S. market in 2007, when 13.6 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds were currently smoking. Between 2007 and 2023, smoking rates among young adults in the Ocean State decreased by 83.1 percent. Comparatively, among all Rhode Island adults, smoking rates decreased by 44.1 percent during the same period.

E-cigarette use has also declined among young Rhode Island adults. In 2023, 17.3 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds were currently using e-cigarettes, which was a 2.8 percent decrease from 2022.

Given the epic lows in young adult smoking rates, lawmakers must refrain from policies that restrict access to alternatives to smoking.

Effects of Cigarette Excise Taxes

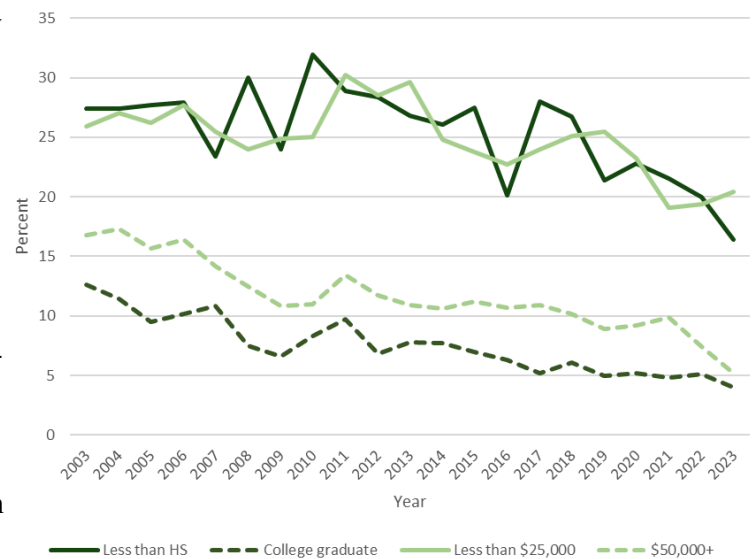
Rhode Island currently imposes a \$4.25-per-pack state cigarette excise tax. Lawmakers often justify excise taxes on cigarettes to deter persons from using combustible cigarettes. These taxes not only disproportionately harm lower income and lower educated adults; the taxes also fail to significantly reduce smoking rates among those persons.

Among Rhode Island adults earning \$25,000 or less, smoking rates decreased on average by 0.8 percent annually between 2003 and 2023, while rates among adults earning \$50,000 or more decreased by 5 percent during the same period. In 2023, low-income adults were 3.9 times more likely to smoke than high income earners.

Among Rhode Islanders who did not graduate high school, 16.4 percent were currently smoking in 2023, compared to 4 percent of college graduates who were smoking. In 2023, adults lacking a high school diploma were 4.1 times more likely to smoke than college graduates.

Lawmakers should refrain from enacting further increases in cigarette taxes given their disproportionate effect on low-income persons, while failing to reduce smoking rates.

Smoking Rates by Education and Income
Rhode Island



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Rhode Island 2025

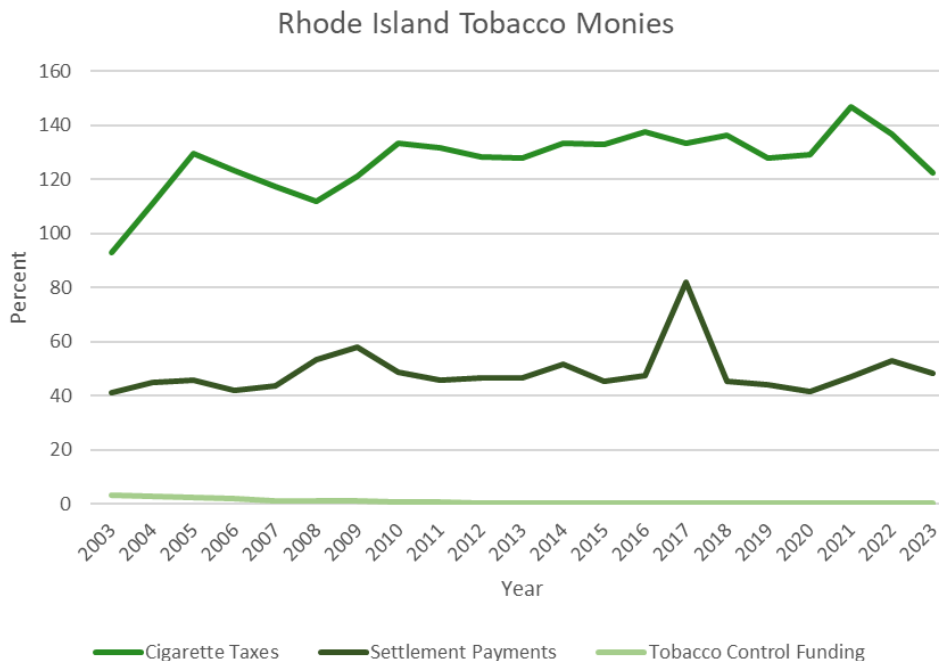
Tobacco Monies

Each year, states receive billions of dollars borne out of the lungs of persons who smoke. This revenue includes excise cigarette taxes and settlement payments. Yet, each year, states spend miniscule amounts of tobacco-related monies on programs to help adults quit smoking and prevent youth use.

In 2023, the Ocean State collected \$122.5 million in state excise tax revenue from combustible cigarettes. This was a 10.5 percent decrease from 2022's \$136.8 million, or \$14.3 million less. Between 2003 and 2023, Rhode Island collected more than \$2.6 billion in cigarette taxes.

Since the 2000s, Rhode Island collected annual payments from tobacco manufacturers based on the percentage of cigarettes and tobacco products sold in the state in that year, after successfully suing manufacturers for smoking-related health care costs. Rhode Island collected \$48.3 million in settlement payments in 2023, an 8.7 percent decrease from 2022's \$52.9 million, or \$4.6 million less. Since 2003, the Ocean State collected more than \$1 billion in tobacco settlement payments.

While Rhode Island collected \$170.8 million in tobacco-related monies in 2023, the state allocated only \$400,000 in state funding towards tobacco control programs, including cessation, education, and youth prevention efforts, which was 0 percent change in funding from 2022. This amounts to 0.3 percent of taxes and 0.8 percent of settlement payments. In 2023, for every \$1 the state received in tobacco monies, it spent less than \$0.01 on tobacco control efforts. Between 2003 and 2023, Rhode Island collected more than \$3.6 billion tobacco monies, yet spent only \$19.6 million (or 0.5 percent) on tobacco control efforts during the same period.



References

1. Data on adult smoking rates comes from the Centers for Disease Control's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey including sections on "Demographics - Race," Tobacco Use - All Categories," and "E-Cigarette Use." Accessed August, 2024. <https://www.cdc.gov/brfss/brfssprevalence/>.
2. Data on race and age was compiled using population data from the Annie E. Casey Foundation (<https://datacenter.kidscount.org/>) and Demographic data from the CDC to cross reference the racial population. Then, data from Smoking and Race, and E-Cigarettes and Age, was used to determine the percent of adults who were smoking in 2023.
3. Data on youth tobacco and vapor product use comes from the CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Accessed December, 2024. <https://yrbs-explorer.services.cdc.gov/#/>.
4. Data on tax information comes from Orzechowski and Walker, "The Tax Burden on Tobacco Historical Compilation Volume 59, 2024, Print.
5. Data on tobacco settlement payments is from Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, "Actual Annual Tobacco Settlement Payments Received by the States, 1998-2024." Accessed December, 2024. <https://assets.tobaccofreekids.org/factsheets/0365.pdf>.
6. Data on tobacco control funding is from Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, "Appendix A: A History of Spending for State Tobacco." Accessed December, 2024, <https://assets.tobaccofreekids.org/factsheets/0209.pdf>.