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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – January 27, 2025

GBHWC Launches Merchant Education Program to Decrease Youth Use of Nicotine Products

Tamuning, Guam - The Guam Behavioral Health and Wellness Center (GBHWC) will conduct the **Merchant Education Program**, which consists of opt-in door-to-door visits to retail licensed vendors of tobacco and vape products through May 2025. This initiative, led by the agency's Prevention and Training Branch (PEACE office), is part of an ongoing merchant education effort aimed at improving Guam's compliance to tobacco-related laws and regulations, ultimately decreasing rates of nicotine use among youth.

During the visits, GBHWC will provide brief education and resources, and will gather valuable feedback from retailers about the additional support they need to meet legal requirements. The outreach aligns with Guam Public Law No. 24-278 (Tobacco Control Act) and Guam Public Law No. 34-01 (Youth Protection Act of 2017), which mandate GBHWC to lead efforts in preventing tobacco use and access, particularly among youth.

According to the Guam FY 2025 Annual Synar Report, 15 out of 270 eligible retailers inspected were found in violation of tobacco regulations, with three of these violations being repeat offenses within the past five years. This underscores the need for consistent education and support for retailers.

“This is the first year GBHWC is conducting retailer visits focused on merchant education,” said Director Carissa Pangelinan. “Our local retailers play a crucial role in youth nicotine prevention as the first line of public access to tobacco and vape products. Ensuring they understand the public laws, the impact of its proper compliance to our community health, and best practices for adherence is essential to our shared mission.” Since the announcement of a vaping epidemic among youth throughout the country in 2020, the Guam SEOW has reported an increasing rate of vape use among school-aged adolescents, most recently recorded at one in every three middle and high school students.

For this pilot launch, up to 100 retailers were randomly selected to be invited to participate. Retailers or vendors may also volunteer to participate in the merchant education program by contacting GBHWC Prevention and Training Branch at 671-477-9080, 671-647-5737 or dfs.intern@peaceguam.org.



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Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. What is Merchant Education?

Merchant Education provides targeted training for individuals responsible for selling identified substances in the market. GBHWC's Merchant Education Program focuses on educating tobacco business owners, retailers, and their employees on current tobacco-related laws, such as the Tobacco 21 legal age requirement. Participants will also learn best practices to ensure compliance.

2. What is the purpose of the Merchant Education Program?

The goal of the Merchant Education Program is to assist retailers and their staff in understanding and adhering to local tobacco laws. This proactive effort helps businesses prepare for future inspections and ensures they are well-equipped to prevent youth access to nicotine products.

3. What does the process look like?

GBHWC's outreach team will invite or take volunteer establishments to meet on these topics:

- A review of the tobacco educational packet.
- A discussion on tobacco policies and compliance recommendations.
- Guidance through a voluntary brief survey

The visit will take no longer than 20 minutes. Participants will receive a folder with educational materials, store signage and a certificate of appreciation. Participants who are willing to complete a feedback survey may also be eligible for additional incentives. We value your time and willingness to participate and aim to make the process straightforward and equally beneficial.

4. What is the optional survey?

At the end of the visit, participants will be offered an opportunity to provide their feedback. While optional, participant feedback is highly encouraged and greatly appreciated. The survey can be completed either on a print questionnaire or digitally through a QR code.

The feedback gathered helps GBHWC better understand the needs of retailers. The survey assesses retailers' knowledge of local tobacco laws and evaluates the effectiveness of Merchant Education resources. All responses are anonymous and will be compiled and used for program improvement purposes only.

6. Is this visit part of the required compliance inspections (aka annual Synar inspection)?

No, this outreach is a separate educational initiative from the Synar inspection. Participation, however, may increase retailer preparedness for compliance inspections.

For additional information or questions, please contact our team. We look forward to supporting your business in promoting responsible tobacco sales!