

# JUUL targets military personnel and veterans

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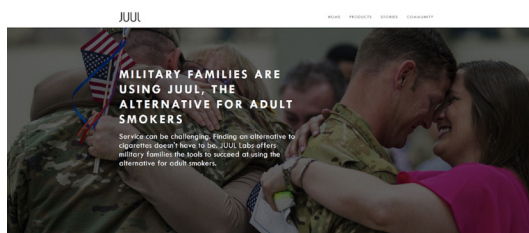
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Published Online First  
12 May 2020

With their recent marketing campaign<sup>1</sup> (figure 1), JUUL joins a long tradition of tobacco companies targeting the US military and veteran population.<sup>1-6</sup> JUUL advertises their electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) with testimonial endorsements from military veterans (figure 2),<sup>2</sup> claims to support veteran service organisations (figure 3),<sup>1</sup> as well as offers discounts (ie, a \$1 starter pack) to military and veterans (figure 4).<sup>3</sup> Perhaps most concerning, although e-cigarettes are not currently approved by the Food and Drug Administration as a cigarette cessation tool,<sup>7</sup> JUUL claims their product, 'offers servicemen and first responders the tools to succeed at switching'.<sup>1</sup>

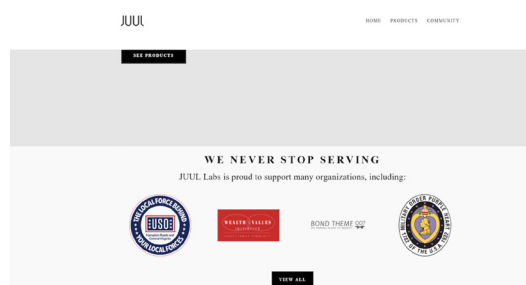
These marketing tactics are not surprising, given that the military has been targeted by tobacco companies since the beginning of the 20th century.<sup>4-6</sup> The tobacco industry has fostered a tobacco culture within the US military<sup>4-6</sup> by distributing coupons in military periodicals<sup>4</sup> and using military bases to hold sponsored events and sell deeply discounted products.<sup>4-6</sup> This population is desirable to the industry, given that most recruits are aged 18-21 years, a high-risk period for tobacco initiation,<sup>5,8</sup> and tobacco has long been promoted as a way to cope with deployment stress.<sup>5,6,9</sup> In addition, tobacco use has received less military commander attention than other health promotion concerns,<sup>10</sup> and the nature of the work environment, especially in deployed settings, can encourage tobacco use.<sup>11</sup> Thus, it is no surprise that tobacco



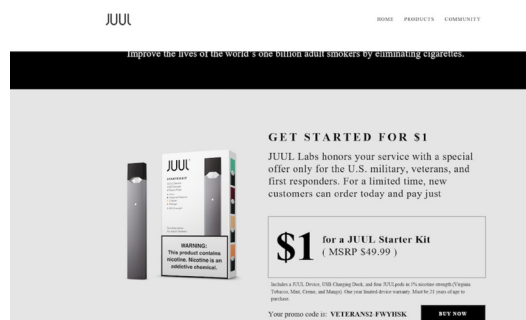
**Figure 1** JUUL markets to military families in recent advertising campaign. Website source: <https://heroes.juul.com>.



**Figure 2** JUUL promotes products with veteran testimonials. Website source: <https://heroes.juul.com>.



**Figure 3** JUUL claims to promote veteran service organizations in marketing campaign. Website source: <https://heroes.juul.com>.



**Figure 4** JUUL offers discounts to military personnel and veterans. Website source: <https://shop.id.me/stores/2652-juul>.

rates in the military far exceed that in the civilian population,<sup>12-14</sup> a trend that is seen with the use of e-cigarettes as well.<sup>15,16</sup> Yet, tobacco use negatively impacts military readiness and is associated with significant Department of Defense medical costs (\$1.6 billion annually).<sup>17,18</sup> This disparity of e-cigarette use is notable for younger personnel, given that this is the most commonly used product among young adults,<sup>19-21</sup> with rising rates among youth who initiate for reasons other than cigarette cessation.<sup>19-21</sup>

Although the US military has historically supported tobacco use, newer policies and efforts focus on reducing prevalence.<sup>22-24</sup> One policy<sup>22</sup> requires pricing of products on base to match prevailing local prices in the community (including applicable taxes), aiming to decrease accessibility of cheap products and consequently reduce prevalence.<sup>25</sup> This year, the Army Public Health Center warned service members about harms of vaping,<sup>23</sup> and Army and Air Force Exchange Service even banned the sale of e-cigarettes on base.<sup>24</sup> However, military e-cigarette users are more likely to buy off base,<sup>26</sup> so these policies are likely less effective at reducing the prevalence of this product. Further, state Tobacco 21 laws, restricting tobacco

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**To cite:** Fahey MC, Krukowski RA, Talcott GW, et al. *Tob Control* 2020;**29**:e163-e164.

purchases to those aged under 21 years, mostly exempt military personnel.<sup>27</sup> Consequently, there will be growing opportunity for tobacco companies to target personnel between the ages of 18 and 20 years.

Thus, despite JUUL promoting their products as cigarette cessation tools,<sup>1</sup> JUUL's recent marketing has the most potential to increase e-cigarette use among younger personnel. This is particularly concerning, given growing evidence that using e-cigarettes is associated with subsequent cigarette initiation among youth.<sup>28 29</sup> Policy makers and public health professionals may need to consider prohibiting and increasing awareness of these types of targeted e-cigarette price promotions and advertisements in this vulnerable population. Such policies have the potential to curb the e-cigarette epidemic among younger personnel<sup>15 19–21</sup> and help rectify a long history of normalising tobacco use in the US military.

**Contributors** MF wrote first draft of the manuscript. RAK, GWT and MAL revised and edited the manuscript.

**Funding** This study was funded by grants (DA043468, DA037273) from the National Institute of Drug Abuse.

**Disclaimer** The views expressed are those of the authors and do not reflect the official views or policy of the Department of Defense or its Components. The views expressed are those of the authors and do not reflect the official views or policy of the National Institutes of Health. The voluntary, fully informed consent of the subjects used in this research was obtained as required by 32 CFR 219 and DODI 3216.02\_AFI 40-402. The views of JUUL are not necessarily the official views of, or endorsed by, the US Government, the Department of Defense or the Department of the Air Force. No Federal endorsement of JUUL is intended.

**Competing interests** None declared.

**Patient consent for publication** Not required.

**Provenance and peer review** Not commissioned; externally peer reviewed.

**Data availability statement** There are no data in this work.

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