



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 21, 2011

CONTACT: Peg O'Connell 919-208-5226

poconnell@fuquaysolutions.com

**66% of North Carolina Voters Favor \$1.00 Cigarette Tax
Increase to Help Close Budget Deficit and Fund Health Programs**

Cigarette tax would bring in \$338.4 million in new revenue, reduce youth smoking

Raleigh, NC – A new poll released today finds 66 percent of North Carolina voters support raising the tax on cigarettes by \$1.00 per pack to cut the state's budget deficit and fund public health programs.

This support comes from a broad-based coalition of voters, including 61 percent of Republicans, 72 percent of Democrats, and 61 percent of Independents.

“At a time when North Carolina is dealing with a huge budget deficit, voters across North Carolina understand raising the tobacco tax is a smart way to tackle this problem and, more importantly, protect our kids from smoking,” said Pam Seamans, Executive Director of the North Carolina Alliance for Health. “Sadly, the Governor missed a tremendous opportunity in her budget proposal. But now is the time for the members of the General Assembly to listen to the 66 percent of North Carolina voters who want to protect our children and improve our state's financial situation by raising the tax on cigarettes by \$1.”

The survey of 500 registered North Carolina voters was conducted by the polling firm Public Opinion Strategies and released by the North Carolina Alliance for Health.

According to the survey, raising the tobacco tax is the only option for addressing the budget shortfall favored by a majority of voters. While 62 percent support increasing the tobacco tax as a budget balancing measure, support jumps to 66 percent when some of the revenue is used to fund public health measures. Strong majorities *opposed* other options such as reducing funding for education, Medicaid health services, closing state prisons or increasing other taxes.

“If the choice is between releasing convicted criminals, overcrowding classrooms or raising the tobacco tax; this should be a very easy choice for any elected official to make,” said Seamans.

Data from the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids and other public health organizations found that a \$1.00 increase in North Carolina's cigarette tax would raise \$338.4 million in new annual revenue. The tax increase would also keep 81,200 North Carolina kids from smoking, encourage 49,500 current smokers to quit and save \$1.8 billion in long-term tobacco-related health care costs. North Carolina's current cigarette tax is 45 cents per pack, which ranks as the 7th lowest in the nation.

The survey was conducted February 8-10, 2011 by Public Opinion Strategies. The statewide poll has a random sample of 500 North Carolina voters and has a margin of error of +/- 4.38 percentage points.

-more-

North Carolina Alliance for Health:

The North Carolina Alliance for Health is an independent, statewide coalition of public, private, professional and non-profit organizations advocating for obesity and tobacco use prevention policies before North Carolina's legislative and executive branches. Alliance members and partners include the American Heart Association, the American Cancer Society, American Lung Association, NC Pediatric Society, NC Prevention Partners, Local Health Directors Association, State Employees Association of NC, March of Dimes, American Diabetes Association, the Covenant with NC's Children, AARP, the Council of Churches and many others.

For further information about the North Carolina Alliance for Health and its policy priorities, contact Pam Seamans at (919) 949-5992 or pamseamans@nc.rr.com .

###