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North Carolina Ranks 45th in Protecting Kids from Tobacco
NC Alliance for Health Will Continue Fight to Restore Funding

Raleigh – Fifteen years after the 1998 state tobacco settlement, North Carolina ranks 45th in the nation in funding programs to prevent kids from smoking and help smokers quit, according to a national report released today by a coalition of public health organizations.

North Carolina currently spends $1.2 million a year on tobacco prevention and cessation programs, which is 1.1 percent of the $106.8 million recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Last year, state lawmakers budgeted zero state funds for North Carolina’s tobacco prevention program, reducing funding from the previous level of $17.3 million. This year, North Carolina has allocated $1.2 million in state funds to maintain the state’s quitline to help smokers quit, but all other tobacco prevention programs remain unfunded by the state.

“How many years do we have to hear from our national partners about the broken promises to North Carolina’s children?” said Pam Seamans, Executive Director of the North Carolina Alliance for Health. “Policymakers ask us ‘Who doesn’t know about the dangers of smoking and tobacco use?’ Well, kids don’t know! Every year 100,000 children start middle school and they are the prime target for experimentation with tobacco products,” said Seamans.

“The lack of youth tobacco use prevention funding in our state is even more frightening as we see more attempts by the tobacco industry to hook our kids on tobacco. Their attempts to make chewing tobacco, hookah and e-cigarettes “cool” demonstrates the absolute need for these youth tobacco use prevention programs. The North Carolina Alliance for Health will continue the fight in the legislature to restore funding for the valuable and life saving programs. We know we can and must do better for our children,” Seamans concluded.

Other key findings for North Carolina include:
• North Carolina this year will collect $409.6 million in revenue from the 1998 tobacco settlement and tobacco taxes, but will spend just 0.3 percent of it on tobacco cessation programs and nothing on prevention programs. This means North Carolina is spending less than a penny of every dollar in tobacco revenue to fight tobacco use.
The tobacco companies spend $349.8 million a year to market their products in North Carolina. This is 292 times what the state spends on tobacco prevention.

The annual report on states’ funding of tobacco prevention programs, titled “A Broken Promise to Our Children: The 1998 State Tobacco Settlement 15 Years Later,” was released by the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, American Heart Association, American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, American Lung Association, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Americans for Nonsmokers’ Rights.

North Carolina’s tobacco prevention program has helped drive down smoking rates in the state. From 2001 to 2011, North Carolina reduced smoking among high school students by 44 percent (from 27.8 percent to 15.5 percent who smoke).

“North Carolina once again is one of the most disappointing states when it comes to protecting kids from tobacco. Unless state leaders quickly restore funding for tobacco prevention, North Carolina will pay a high price with more kids smoking, more lives lost to tobacco and more spending on tobacco-related health care costs,” said Matthew L. Myers, President of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. “Tobacco prevention is a smart investment that saves lives and saves money. North Carolina is being truly penny-wise and pound-foolish by shortchanging tobacco prevention programs.”

In North Carolina, 15.5 percent of high school students smoke, and 7,600 more kids become regular smokers each year. Tobacco annually claims 12,200 lives and costs the state $2.5 billion in health care bills.

Nationally, the report finds that most states are failing to adequately fund tobacco prevention and cessation programs. Key national findings of the report include:

- The states this year will collect $25 billion from the tobacco settlement and tobacco taxes, but will spend just 1.9 percent of it – $481.2 million – on tobacco prevention programs. This means the states are spending less than two cents of every dollar in tobacco revenue to fight tobacco use.
- States are falling woefully short of the CDC’s recommended funding levels for tobacco prevention programs. Altogether, the states have budgeted just 13 percent of the $3.7 billion the CDC recommends.
- Only two states – Alaska and North Dakota – currently fund tobacco prevention programs at the CDC-recommended level.

There is more evidence than ever before that tobacco prevention and cessation programs work to reduce smoking, save lives and save money. Florida, which has a well-funded, sustained tobacco prevention program, reduced its high school smoking rate to just 8.6 percent in 2013, far below the national rate. One study found that during the first 10 years of its tobacco prevention program, Washington state saved more than $5 in tobacco-related hospitalization costs for every $1 spent on the program.
Tobacco use is the number one cause of preventable death in the U.S., killing more than 400,000 people and costing $96 billion in health care bills each year. Nationally, about 18 percent of adults and 18.1 percent of high school students smoke.

More information, including the full report and state-specific information, can be obtained at www.tobaccofreekids.org/reports/settlements.

**Background:**

**North Carolina Alliance for Health:**
The North Carolina Alliance for Health is an independent, statewide coalition of public, private, professional and nonprofit 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, the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, American Lung Association, NC Pediatric Society, NC Prevention Partners, Local Health Directors Association, March of Dimes, American Diabetes Association, the NC Health Access Coalition, the Covenant with NC’s Children, AARP, the Council of Churches and many others.