

Nevada comes up short on tobacco prevention

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Any lawmaker with an earnest desire to curb health care spending in Nevada would do well to read a recently released report from a coalition led by the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. “Broken Promises to Our Children: The 1998 State Tobacco Settlement 15 Years Later” ([www.tobaccofreekids.org](http://www.tobaccofreekids.org)) finds that fifteen years after the master settlement agreement with the tobacco industry, Nevada continues to shortchange cost-effective, life-saving tobacco prevention programs.

Tobacco use remains the number one cause of preventable death in Nevada, killing nearly 4,000 Nevadans each year, and is responsible for a staggering \$2.6 billion in annual health care costs, lost income, and diminished workplace productivity in our state. The state and federal tax burden from smoking-related government expenditures is an estimated \$532 per household.

Over the past decade and a half, Nevada policymakers have broken their promise to spend a significant portion of tobacco settlement dollars on programs to prevent kids from smoking and help smokers quit.

“It is public health malpractice that the states are spending so little on tobacco prevention programs despite having so much evidence that these programs work to save lives and save money,” said Matthew Myers, President of CTFK. “To win the fight against tobacco, elected officials at all levels must step up efforts to implement proven solutions, including well-funded tobacco prevention programs.”

In Nevada, “stepping up” will require lawmakers to increase funding for tobacco control efforts to levels recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Based on existing science, projected population growth, and current levels of tobacco use in our state, the CDC recommends that Nevada spend \$32 million (or about one-quarter) of annual tobacco-related revenue on tobacco prevention and cessation programs.

This year, Nevada will collect \$139 million in state tobacco revenue – \$38 million from the tobacco settlement and \$101 million from taxes on cigarettes and other tobacco products. However, we will only spend \$1 million or 3.1 percent of CDC-recommended levels on tobacco prevention programs. Though this year’s funding is a slight increase from last year, it fails to restore deep cuts to tobacco prevention efforts in Nevada since 2008.

It is simply inexcusable that Nevada continues to spend less than one penny of every dollar received in settlement funds and tobacco taxes on prevention and cessation efforts.

As we are several months from legislative bill draft deadlines and the predictable chaos of an approaching legislative session, I challenge one lawmaker from either political party to dedicate one bill draft to legislation fully funding evidence-based tobacco prevention programs proven to prevent our kids from using tobacco, help our state's residents quit smoking, and ultimately better the health of all Nevadans.

We now possess abundant evidence about what works to reduce the human suffering and financial toll of tobacco in our state. It's now time to stop shortchanging those efforts in Nevada once and for all.

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