

Nevada's unfinished business of tobacco prevention

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“Proven tobacco control strategies and programs, in combination with enhanced strategies to rapidly eliminate the use of cigarettes and other combustible, or burned, tobacco products, will help us achieve a society free of tobacco-related death and disease.” From the 2014 Surgeon General Report on the Health Consequences of Smoking

For the past 17 years, the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids has annually taken stock of tobacco prevention and control efforts by Nevada and other states, including the use of tobacco-generated revenue on programs to prevent kids from smoking and help smokers quit.

The Campaign's new report once again reveals that Nevada policymakers have reneged on their commitment to spend a significant portion of tobacco tax revenue and settlement dollars on the number one cause of preventable death in Nevada: tobacco use.

In 2016, Nevada will collect an estimated \$213 million in state tobacco revenue – about \$40 million from the tobacco master settlement agreement and the rest from taxes on tobacco products. However, only \$1 million will be spent by Nevada on tobacco cessation and prevention – this figure represents less than four percent of the level recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to fully fund a comprehensive statewide tobacco control program.

Despite steady progress made by the Washoe County Health District and other health authorities in Nevada in reducing both youth and adult smoking rates, smoking will be responsible for 4,100 deaths and over \$1 billion in health care costs directly caused by smoking in our state this year. Nevada residents' annual state and federal tax burden from smoking-caused government expenditures is a staggering \$803 per household.

Fortunately, we know what works to prevent smoking initiation and promote quitting: hard-hitting media campaigns, easy-to-access cessation treatment and promotion of cessation treatment in clinical settings, smoke-free policies, and tobacco prevention at CDC-recommended levels.

Unfortunately, tobacco industry marketing outguns combined county and state spending on tobacco prevention efforts in Nevada by a ratio of 78 to 1. The Surgeon General puts matters even more bluntly: “The root cause of the smoking epidemic is evident – the tobacco industry

aggressively markets and promotes lethal and addictive products, and continues to recruit youth and young adults as new consumers of these products.”

As we are many months from legislative bill draft deadlines and more than a year from the predictable chaos of the 2017 legislative session, I challenge one lawmaker from either party to consider legislation that fully funds evidence-based tobacco prevention programs proven to keep kids from using tobacco and that rids our state of the scourge of tobacco.

For nearly twenty years, in both good times and bad, Nevada has spent tobacco tax revenue and settlement dollars on everything but tobacco cessation and control – the time has long since passed for lawmakers to stop shortchanging tobacco prevention once and for all.

Additional information on tobacco prevention and the toll of tobacco in Nevada is available from the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids www.tobaccofreekids.org.

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