
Tobacco Free Mass

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Dear Legislator:

The Tobacco Free Mass coalition has been partnering with the Legislature for almost two decades in reducing the health effects of tobacco. As a result, innumerable lives have been saved and disease has been reduced, resulting in Documented health care cost savings to the Commonwealth. Nonetheless, **tobacco still prematurely kills almost 9,000 Massachusetts residents each year and costs in excess of \$4.3 billion in preventable health care costs to taxpayers and private purchasers of health insurance.** This year, we urge you to continue those efforts!

This week, the Governor's Fiscal Year 2013 State Budget proposal *adopted three evidenced-based strategies to reduce tobacco use* by: (1) Expanding access to tobacco cessation medications, devices and counseling; (2) increasing the price of tobacco products, and (3) expanding the capacity of the Department of Public Health's anti-tobacco program. We endorse that comprehensive approach!

Tobacco Cessation: The highly successful MassHealth tobacco cessation benefit has been proven to reduce tobacco use and have a short-term return on investment to the Commonwealth of over \$3 for every \$1 invested. The Governor's proposal would replicate that program for people covered by the Commonwealth Care Health Insurance Program (\$2 million) and by the Group Insurance Commission (\$2 million). An additional \$700,000 would be given to DPH for a Quit Smoking Patch Giveaway initiative aimed at veterans and their families (\$700,000).

Tobacco Taxes: Significant tobacco tax increases are a proven strategy to sharply reduce tobacco use, and thus, tobacco-caused disease, death and costs. This strategy is especially useful regarding youth because they are more price sensitive. The Governor's proposal would raise the cigarette tax by 50 cents per pack; taxes on other tobacco products (OTP) would be raised to levels so as to make those mainly youth-focused products – cheap, flavored small cigars and smokeless products – as expensive as cigarettes. We prefer an even higher cigarette tax level because the evidence shows that a 10 percent increase in retail price of cigarettes is a clear threshold to assure reduction in use.

DPH Funding: The DPH's anti-tobacco program is currently funded at \$4.150,703 (item 4590-0300). This is far less than the \$30 million program that the CDC considers *minimal* for a state of this size and only about 0.5 percent of the \$832 million in tobacco tax and Master Settlement Agreement funds received by the state annually. The Governor would increase that appropriation by \$1.7 million (including the veterans' cessation program discussed above). This would allow for more support of local community efforts and for further cessation efforts aimed at high use populations such as veterans, individuals with low income, or, persons with other diseases or disabilities whose health is at high risk.

We thank you for your consideration and support.

For more information, contact Tobacco Free Mass at 508-270-4652 or stephen.shestakofsky@cancer.org