



# Health Policy Snapshot

Public Health and Prevention

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## ISSUE BRIEF

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## How can we reduce tobacco use?

### Takeaways:

- Implementing proven, cost-effective policy approaches like higher tobacco taxes and smoke-free laws will protect Americans' health and save health care dollars.
- Cuts in state prevention and cessation programs and uneven application of smoke-free laws and tobacco taxes are hurting efforts to curtail smoking.
- A national strategy that incorporates efforts on the federal, state and local levels can bolster the fight against tobacco.

### Overview

Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death in the United States. It kills more than 400,000 Americans annually—more than HIV/AIDS, alcohol, car accidents, illegal drugs, murders, suicides and fires combined. About 50,000 victims are adult nonsmokers who die because of exposure to secondhand smoke. Tobacco use also exacts a huge financial toll, costing the nation \$96 billion in health care expenditures and another \$97 billion in lost productivity annually.<sup>1</sup>

### POLICIES THAT REDUCE TOBACCO USE

Science and experience have identified proven, cost-effective strategies that prevent young people from smoking, help smokers quit and protect everyone from secondhand smoke. These strategies include higher tobacco taxes, laws requiring smoke-free

workplaces and public spaces and well-funded prevention and cessation programs.

- **Making tobacco products more expensive.** Tobacco companies' own documents, disclosed during lawsuits in the 1990s, are among the most compelling evidence of the effectiveness of raising cigarette taxes to deter smokers. Research by Philip Morris, RJ Reynolds and others showed that pricing was a huge driver in whether a consumer purchased one of their products.<sup>2</sup> Subsequent economic research has confirmed that cigarette taxes or price increases reduce both adult and underage smoking. Nearly every state has increased cigarette taxes.<sup>2</sup>
- **Eliminating secondhand smoke exposure.** Secondhand smoke has been linked with cancer, heart disease and respiratory illness in nonsmokers and is considered to be a leading cause of indoor air pollution. Smoke-free laws not only protect the public from these toxins and improve the overall health of nonsmokers, they encourage smokers to quit and prevent young people from starting to smoke.<sup>3</sup> As of August 2011, 29 states and the District of Columbia had passed such legislation.
- **Preventing youths from smoking and helping smokers quit.** When properly funded, implemented and sustained, anti-smoking programs reduce smoking among both youths and adults.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, most states are failing to properly fund proven prevention and cessation programs despite collecting more than \$25 billion annually in tobacco revenue from tobacco taxes and the 1998 landmark state tobacco settlement.<sup>5</sup>

## WHY PROGRESS HAS STALLED

As cigarette taxes were pushed upward—the average is now \$1.45 per pack nationwide—and successes recorded with state and local smoke-free laws and tobacco prevention initiatives, smoking rates fell to one in five American adults. Then, starting in 2004, the decline slowed. There are several explanations for this plateau.

- **States cut funding for tobacco prevention and cessation programs to the lowest level since 1999.** States have slashed funding for programs to reduce tobacco use by 12 percent in the past year and by 36 percent over the past four years. In Fiscal year 2012 states will collect \$25.6 billion in revenue from the 1998 state tobacco settlement and tobacco taxes, but will only spend 1.8 percent of it on prevention and cessation programs. The total amounts states are spending on prevention programs are the lowest since 1999, when states first received tobacco settlement funds.<sup>5</sup>
- **Anti-smoking funding pales in comparison to what tobacco companies spend to market their products.** Tobacco companies spend \$9.9 billion<sup>6</sup> a year to market tobacco products, according to the latest reports of the Federal Trade Commission. The total means that for every dollar states spend to prevent youths from smoking and help smokers quit, tobacco companies spend nearly \$20 to market tobacco products.<sup>7</sup>
- **Tobacco taxes and comprehensive smoke-free laws work, but some states have not adequately implemented these measures.** Twenty-one states still have not adopted strong statewide smoke-free laws that cover all workplaces, including restaurants and bars, and tobacco taxes remain relatively low in many states.

## EFFORTS TO BOOST PROGRESS

An aggressive national effort would reinvigorate the fight against tobacco, restore momentum and achieve

substantive gains during this decade. This effort must include:

- **Rigorous implementation of the Food and Drug Administration’s (FDA) new authority to regulate tobacco products.** The Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act, which allows FDA to regulate the manufacturing, marketing and sale of tobacco products, became law in 2009. The agency has since cracked down on tobacco marketing and sales to children, banned candy- and fruit-flavored cigarettes, ended use of the deceptive terms “light” and “low-tar” to market cigarettes, required tobacco companies to disclose the contents of their products and unveiled graphic warning labels that soon will be required on all cigarette packs.
- **A national tobacco strategy that is robustly funded and effectively implemented.** The Department of Health and Human Services recently called for a public education campaign and other actions to prevent youth smoking. It is the strongest and most far-reaching federal plan ever proposed to reduce tobacco use.

### WANT TO KNOW MORE?

- [\*A Broken Promise to Our Children: The 1998 State Tobacco Settlement 13 Years Later \(RWJF\)\*](#)
- [\*Interactive Tobacco Map Provides Latest Data on State Smoking Laws \(RWJF\)\*](#)
- [\*Center for Tobacco Products \(FDA\)\*](#)
- [\*Prevent and Reduce Tobacco Use \(DHS\)\*](#)

<sup>1</sup>[http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/facts\\_issues/tobacco\\_101/](http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/facts_issues/tobacco_101/)

<sup>2</sup>[http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0146.pdf?utm\\_source=factsheets\\_finder&utm\\_medium=link&utm\\_campaign=analytics](http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0146.pdf?utm_source=factsheets_finder&utm_medium=link&utm_campaign=analytics)

<sup>3</sup><http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0367.pdf>

<sup>4</sup>[http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/what\\_we\\_do/state\\_local/prevention\\_cessation](http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/what_we_do/state_local/prevention_cessation)

<sup>5</sup><http://www.rwjf.org/files/research/20111140ctfk.pdf>

<sup>6</sup>[http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/press\\_releases/post/ftc\\_reports\\_show\\_tobacco\\_companies\\_still\\_spend\\_huge\\_sums\\_on\\_marketing\\_cigar](http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/press_releases/post/ftc_reports_show_tobacco_companies_still_spend_huge_sums_on_marketing_cigar)

<sup>7</sup>[http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/press\\_releases/post/ftc\\_reports\\_show\\_tobacco\\_companies\\_still\\_spend\\_huge\\_sums\\_on\\_marketing\\_cigar](http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/press_releases/post/ftc_reports_show_tobacco_companies_still_spend_huge_sums_on_marketing_cigar)