



Tobacco Policy Research and Evaluation Program

An RWJF national program

SUMMARY

In the *Tobacco Policy Research and Evaluation Program*, which took place between 1992 and 1996, investigators from diverse disciplines conducted policy research aimed at helping public and private policymakers adopt policies to reduce tobacco use, especially among children and youth.

Researchers came from medicine, health economics, political science, public health, sociology, psychology, criminal justice, and law.

Twenty-two research projects received funding through two rounds of grantmaking between 1993 and 1994. The program funded both well-recognized tobacco policy researchers and researchers who applied to tobacco their knowledge of other fields.

Key Results

An evaluation of the program by the Lewin Group, Fairfax, Va., reported the following.

- Research and researchers supported by the national program made material contributions to the national debate on tobacco policy.
- The program generated high quality research and achieved widespread dissemination of its findings, including articles in leading journals and testimony in court cases.
- The impact of the national program was heightened because the program supported research that was innovative and was performed by accomplished researchers, about 25 percent of whom were relatively new to tobacco policy research.
- The projects helped to identify priority topics for future tobacco policy investigations and stimulated follow-up research by the project directors themselves.
- The projects also coincided with an overall increase in the number of peer-reviewed policy articles related to tobacco over the past 11 years.

- As of the date of the evaluation report, January 1997, the studies supported under Tobacco Policy Research Program had produced 39 articles in peer-reviewed journals and 54 presentations at professional conferences.

Program Administration

Technical assistance and direction to the program were provided by the national program office located at Stanford University, under the leadership of Robert L. Rabin, J.D., Ph.D., (program director) at the law school and David G. Altman, Ph.D., (deputy director) then located at the medical school.

Funding

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) Board of Trustees authorized the program in January 1992 for a total of up to \$5 million.

THE PROBLEM

The production of tobacco products is a large and profitable industry in the U.S. economy, at great social, economic, and personal cost.

A large portion of U.S. residents continues to be addicted to nicotine; more than 430,000 deaths per year are attributable to tobacco use in the United States; smoking causes significant levels of illness, injury (in fires), and disability; and the U.S. health care system expends enormous resources treating preventable tobacco-related problems.

Tobacco Is the #1 Preventable Health Risk

Tobacco use—which includes the use of cigarettes, cigars, pipe tobacco, and smokeless tobacco—is by far the most important preventable cause of cancer, heart disease, and premature death in all economically developed countries.

Tobacco is a highly addictive substance that is nevertheless legal and marketed by an industry that is a significant force within our economy. Societal views toward restricting tobacco use are markedly more favorable than in the past, and per capita tobacco consumption has declined.

Tobacco use remains, nonetheless, the leading preventable cause of death in the United States, and initiation of tobacco use among teenagers—which rose rapidly in the 1990s—shows little susceptibility to evolving societal norms.

According to the Tobacco Information and Prevention Source at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [website](#), the number of adolescents who become daily smokers before the age of 18 years increased by 73 percent from 1988 (708,000) to 1996 (1.226 million).

This increase means that each day, the number of adolescents under 18 who become daily smokers rose from nearly 2,000 to more than 3,000 persons. If the rate of smoking initiation among young people had held constant since 1988, then 1.5 million fewer persons under the age of 18 years would have become daily smokers by 1996.

The Need for Tobacco Policy Research

Although attempting to reduce the use of a highly addictive, legal substance was likely to be controversial, the timing was right for beginning this national program. Americans were showing more receptivity to tobacco control, especially regarding children and youth.

In response to the statistics on the substantial health consequences of tobacco use, public health officials and others were calling on federal, state, and local governments to enact laws to limit tobacco product marketing and use.

A strong consensus was building within the tobacco control field about the importance of population-based public policy interventions to reduce tobacco use. However, groundwork in the 1980s by several key organizations, including the American Cancer Society and the National Cancer Institute, showed that little empirical research existed to inform policymakers about the likely impact of alternative policy measures.

In 1982, the American Cancer Society established the National Coordinating Committee for Tobacco-Related Research and on its recommendation developed the National Conference on Smoking and Health. Its purposes were to provide a means to assess scientific progress in the field of tobacco and health, share future research plans among participating agencies and voluntary organizations, and recommend priority topics for additional research.

In 1987, the Coordinating Committee reviewed and categorized the tobacco-related research funded by the National Cancer Institute (NCI) and the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, the two principal government sponsors of tobacco-related research.

This review concluded that some areas, such as self-help and physician cessation interventions, had been adequately studied, while relatively little work had been done in policy research.

Prompted by this finding, as well as a report on tobacco policy research prepared for NCI by John Pinney, former director of the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Office on Smoking and Health, the Coordinating Committee established a subcommittee on policy research.

By the late 1980s, a broad spectrum of organizations and health professionals, including those that funded the majority of all tobacco-related research in the United States, had

determined the need for policy research and identified some of the priority policy topics. In the early 1990s, California and Massachusetts both implemented tobacco control programs.

CONTEXT

Despite a growing recognition among public health leaders and the population at large of the severe health consequences and economic costs of tobacco use, when RWJF's Substance Abuse Goal Development Work Group made a presentation to the Board of Trustees in July 1991, they reported that relatively few societal resources were being devoted to analyzing and solving these tobacco-related problems.

As a leading philanthropy whose mission is to improve the health and health care of the American people, RWJF's stance toward tobacco use is unequivocal. Reducing the harm from tobacco use has long been a central theme of the Foundation's programs on substance abuse, with particular focus on preventing children from starting to smoke.

Since 1991, RWJF has supported more than 150 grants in the tobacco area, beginning with the first such grant to Stop Teenage Addiction to Tobacco.

RWJF supports:

- State coalitions to reduce tobacco use.
- A partnership with major league baseball to reduce the use of spit tobacco.
- Promulgation of smoking-cessation guidelines to clinicians.
- The establishment and continuing support of [The National Center for Tobacco-Free Kids](#).

The *Tobacco Policy Research and Evaluation Program* was an important component of RWJF's early grantmaking in the tobacco area and the first significant investment in tobacco policy research by any foundation.

The need for policy research documented by the Coordinating Committee, coupled with the modest levels of support in place at the time the program was authorized in January 1992, underscored the opportunity for RWJF to take a leadership role and to expect a significant impact for its investment.

PROGRAM DESIGN

Projects funded under the *Tobacco Policy Research and Evaluation Program* were investigator-initiated and peer-reviewed. They sought to find the best ways of reducing tobacco use via the application of policies, and to provide a full understanding of the advantages, disadvantages, and impact of these policies.

Program Parameters

The program was set up to have two funding cycles for tobacco policy research and evaluation projects. Grants ranged up to \$350,000 for projects lasting up to three years. A Call for Proposals for the first round of funding was mailed in September 1992 and the second round of funding in November 1993.

The Call for Proposals went to federal and state representatives and agencies; schools of public policy, medicine, and law; public health, disease prevention, and health research organizations; hospital, managed care, and insurance directors; and tobacco control and advocacy groups.

The program sought research projects addressing policies to reduce tobacco use at the national, state, or local levels in the public sector, or private-sector policies within companies, associations, unions, or trade groups.

For each funding round, a wide range of issues of interest to the program was identified. To be considered favorably under this program, a proposal was required to demonstrate the potential to produce new information directly relevant to policies intended to reduce tobacco use. Proposals were assessed using the following criteria:

- The significance of the tobacco-related policy being evaluated or analyzed.
- The timeliness of the project for informing policy development or implementation.
- The quality and availability of data to be used and the strength of the proposed methodology.
- The applicant's experience and qualifications for conducting the proposed project.
- The strength of the applicant's plan for disseminating project results.

THE PROGRAM

Technical assistance and direction to the program were provided by the national program office located at Stanford University, under the leadership of Robert L. Rabin, J.D., Ph.D., (program director) at the law school and David G. Altman, Ph.D., (deputy director) then located at the medical school.

During the early stage of the program, when letters of intent were received and full proposals requested from selected applicants, a national ad hoc advisory group comprised of seven tobacco control experts was convened to provide feedback to program and RWJF staff on program priorities. In 1992, both a pool of peer reviewers and a national advisory committee (see the [Appendix](#) for listing) were established to assist the national program office in reviewing the proposals and selecting the projects to be funded.

The Selection Process

In early 1993, 11 first-round grantees were selected from a pool of 220 applicants who submitted "letters of intent," which are short descriptions of proposed projects.

In early 1994, 10 second-round grantees were selected from a pool of 114 applicants who submitted letters of intent. national program office and RWJF staff evaluated the letters of intent to determine which applicants would be asked to submit full proposals.

This first stage of the review process resulted in the solicitation of 40 full proposals in round one and 25 full proposals in round two. Each full proposal was evaluated by national program office staff, RWJF staff, and a group of reviewers using a standardized review protocol.

These proposals, along with the outside written reviews for each, were sent to the national advisory committee for review and discussion at a meeting. The national advisory committee then made final grant selection decisions.

Projects Funded

Twenty-two research projects were funded with \$4.7 million under the two funding cycles. The projects were diverse in content, method, and disciplinary focus of the investigators. The program funded both well-recognized tobacco policy researchers and researchers who have applied to tobacco their knowledge of other fields.

Researchers addressed the following tobacco policy topics. The number in parenthesis indicates the number of research projects in this area; where a project falls in two areas, it is counted in the primary one. The projects in this report are organized according to topic area.

- Youth access (4)
- Tobacco control (4)
- Advertising and promotion (2)
- Environmental tobacco smoke (2)
- The costs of smoking (2)
- Worksite regulation (2)
- Insurance coverage structures (1)
- Tobacco as a drug (1)
- Tobacco tort liability (1)
- Public opinion (1)
- Policymaker attitudes (1)
- Environmental and policy influences (1)

Technical Assistance and Direction

The national program office was responsible for publicizing the initiative, overseeing and participating in the competitive review and selection process, monitoring the performance

of grantees, providing technical assistance as needed, convening grant recipients at annual meetings, coordinating dissemination of findings to appropriate audiences, and ensuring that proposed projects complemented rather than duplicated policy research supported by other funders.

EVALUATION

As part of a comprehensive assessment of both this program and the *Substance Abuse Policy Research Program*, RWJF established a program contract with the Lewin Group, Fairfax, Va., for an external evaluation of the program.

The evaluation began in December 1996 and was completed in May 1997. The evaluation included interviews and/or focus groups with RWJF and national program office staff involved with the *Tobacco Policy Research and Evaluation Program* and each of the directors of the projects. The evaluation included a content analysis of proposals submitted to the program to determine the typology of the proposed research and the impact of RWJF funding on the character and amount of research being conducted in the tobacco area.

The results of efforts to disseminate project outcomes were ascertained through a literature review of peer-reviewed policy-related articles on tobacco published from 1985 to 1996.

The review was conducted using four databases (Criminal Justice Periodic Index, Health Planning and Administration Database, MedLine, and National Criminal Justice Reference Service) and an interview protocol with project directors.

For the portion of the assessment that focused on the national program, the primary objective was to address the following question: To what extent has the *Tobacco Policy Research and Evaluation Program* produced increased information on policy relevant options and active use of the information?

OVERALL PROGRAM RESULTS

The Lewin Group, Fairfax, Va., reported the following findings:

- Research and researchers supported by the national program made material contributions to the national debate on tobacco policy.
- The program generated high quality research and achieved widespread dissemination of its findings, including articles in leading journals and testimony in court cases.
- The impact of the national program was heightened because the program supported research that was innovative and was performed by accomplished researchers, about 25 percent of whom were relatively new to tobacco policy research.

- The projects helped to identify priority topics for future tobacco policy investigations and stimulated follow-up research by the project directors themselves.
- The projects also coincided with an overall increase in the number of peer-reviewed policy articles related to tobacco over the past 11 years.
- According to the evaluators, "Between the end of 1985 and mid-1996, the rate of publication of such articles has more than doubled. While this increase cannot be attributed to the establishment and support of [the national program], the fact is that grantee articles are now beginning to appear in impressive numbers ... often in highly regarded journals with broad readerships."

Communications

Particular attention was given in this initiative to active and creative communication of findings in order to heighten their use by decision-makers. Investigators were required to include in their proposals a section on dissemination plans, and technical assistance was provided to maximize this effort.

As of the date of the evaluation report, January 1997, the studies supported under Tobacco Policy Research Program had produced 39 articles in peer-reviewed journals and 54 presentations at professional conferences.

Since that time, there have been additional publications and presentations. See individual project bibliographies, which follow each project description, for complete listings.

The findings were cited hundreds of times in major print and broadcast media and on the World Wide Web. Several presentations were made before federal and state legislative bodies, and findings were cited on several occasions in legal cases.

Six studies were cited in the commentary accompanying the 1996 FDA tobacco regulations. The RWJF Communications Office was involved in dissemination to policymakers and the media, issuing press releases and helping to coordinate national press conferences. RWJF published a media resource guide on tobacco with descriptions of the Tobacco Policy Research Program projects. See the [Bibliography](#) at the end of this report for a comprehensive listing of communications activities by the national program office.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. **Timing is critical in bringing research findings forward to inform policymaking.** RWJF invested resources in tobacco policy research at a time when there was sufficient capacity in the research community to conduct high quality studies, but the field was not oversaturated with either researchers or other funders.

Once RWJF invested relatively limited resources, it had the dual effect of attracting more researchers and more funders to the field, with the latter realizing that tobacco policy research was a legitimate place to invest.

- 2. It was critical for the program to fund objective research that was firmly grounded in science and methodologically sound.** If results were to contribute to real policy development, they could not be advocacy oriented. The program was willing to look at the hard questions; RWJF wanted to know what the findings would be, RWJF staff recognized and accepted that the investigators could have findings and results that would not be advantageous to tobacco control advocates.
- 3. A combination of stringent review standards for which studies are funded and flexibility in funding studies that might be too risky for other funders to support can lead to a methodologically strong and innovative funding portfolio.**

The competitive process for funded grants was an investigator-initiated, peer-reviewed program using a strict review protocol. Flexibility was exhibited in funding studies with no pilot data available, studies with uncertain policy impact, and studies that addressed controversial topics. A willingness to take risks was proven to reap benefits to the field and to the program.

- 4. RWJF's willingness to continue its grantmaking in tobacco policy research over time enabled the national program to be successful in "building the field" of tobacco policy research.** RWJF funded several follow-up studies of the national program-funded research through the *Substance Abuse Policy Research Program*, for example, and awarded grants under the *Substance Abuse Policy Research Program* and other national programs for newly identified priority tobacco policy topics.

It takes longer to realize the impact of policy research in real policy implementation and societal trends. If RWJF had chosen to fund only illicit drug and alcohol policy research under the *Substance Abuse Policy Research Program*—believing that the job of launching the area of tobacco policy research had been completed under the *Tobacco Policy Research Program*—momentum would have been lost and opportunities missed for long-term, significant results.

- 5. Valuable policy research and subsequent policy impact can be developed by structuring a program to solicit proposals from scientists from across diverse fields to apply their expertise to a new area of research.** The Call for Proposals sought proposals for tobacco policy projects from researchers in a variety of relevant fields such as medicine, public health, law, sociology, political science, psychology, health economics, and criminal justice.

This effort to support and expand research on tobacco policy was successful. Researchers from a wide array of disciplines (including some who had not studied tobacco policy previously) investigated a broad spectrum of current salient policy issues).

AFTERWARD

In 1994, RWJF's Board of Trustees authorized the creation of the *Substance Abuse Policy Research Program* (SAPRP)—an expansion of the *Tobacco Policy Research and Evaluation Program* to include research on alcohol and illicit drugs in addition to tobacco—for up to \$11 million over three years (1994–1996), renewed it in 1997 for an additional three years at \$18 million, and in January 2000 for up to \$25 million for an additional five years. Since that date, research on tobacco policy has continued under the new program. See [Program Results Report](#) on SAPRP.

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APPENDIX

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

(Current as of date of the report; as provided by the grantee organization; not verified by RWJF; items not available from RWJF.)

Book Chapters

Gutman MA, Altman DG and Rabin RL. "Tobacco Policy Research." In *To Improve Health and Health Care, 1998–1999: The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Anthology*, S Isaacs and J Knickman (eds.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998. Available [online](#).

Sponsored Conferences

"1994 Annual Meeting of TPREP Grantees," February 1994, Washington. Presentations given by all project directors.

"1995 Annual Meeting of TPREP Grantees," June 1995, Washington. Presentations given by all project directors.

"1996 Annual Meeting of TPREP Grantees," September 1996, Washington. Presentations given by all project directors.

PROJECT LIST

Reports on the projects managed under this National Program are listed below. Click on a project's title to see the complete report, which typically includes a summary, description of the project's objectives, its results or findings, post grant activities and a list of key products.

Advertising and Promotion

- [Model Ordinance "Mini-brief" Guides Cities in Banning Alcohol and Tobacco Billboards](#) (Grant ID# 22934, May 2000)
- [Teens Receive Daily Media Messages to Smoke but Can Be Influenced Otherwise](#) (Grant ID# 22935, May 2000)

Environmental and Policy Influences

- [COMMIT Study: Tobacco Taxes and Workplace Smoking Bans Do Reduce Smoking](#) (Grant ID# 24786, May 2000)

Environmental Tobacco Smoke

- [Legal Analysis Shows: People Affected by Environmental Tobacco Smoke are Protected Under the Americans with Disabilities Act](#) (Grant ID# 24787, May 2000)
- [Source of Research Funding Influences Studies on Health Effects of Environmental Tobacco Smoke](#) (Grant ID# 24783, May 2000)

Insurance Coverage Structures

- [Full-Coverage, Smoking-Cessation Programs Can Help More Smokers Quit](#) (Grant ID# 22927, May 2000)

Policymaker Attitudes

- [State Legislators Vary in Their Attitude Toward Tobacco Control](#) (Grant ID# 22933, May 2000)

Program Evaluation

- [RWJF in the Vanguard with Diverse Funding for Tobacco Policy Research](#) (Grant ID# 31072, May 2000)

Public Opinion

- [Michigan Attempts to Assess Public Opinion on Local Tobacco Control](#) (Grant ID# 22929, May 2000)

The Costs of Smoking

- Statistical Model Developed to Estimate the Medical Costs of Smoking in All 50 States (Grant ID# 24844, May 2000)
- Statistical Model Estimates the Medical Costs of Smoking (Grant ID# 29831, May 2000)

Tobacco as a Drug

- Legal Definition: Nicotine Is a Drug and Cigarettes a Drug-Delivery Mechanism According to Independent Analysis (Grant ID# 26766, May 2000)

Tobacco Control Laws

- Alternative Employment Opportunities Would Offset Loss of Tobacco-Production Jobs (Grant ID# 22930, May 2000)
- Dramatic Changes in Public Perception Stimulate Tobacco Regulation (Grant ID# 26351, May 2000)
- State Enforcement of Federal Tobacco Access Law Varies (Grant ID# 22926, May 2000)
- Tobacco-Control Laws on Clean Air and Youth Access are Enforced Differently (Grant ID# 24785, January 2007)

Tobacco Tort Liability

- Tobacco Industry Is Fighting off More Lawsuits From Individuals and More Types of Claims (Grant ID# 24788, May 2000)

Worksite Regulation

- Smoke-Free Hospitals Lead to Smoke-Free Employees (Grant ID# 22931, May 2000)
- Unions Support Efforts to Control Workplace Smoking (Grant ID# 22925, May 2000)

Youth Access

- California Merchants Need More Motivation to Reduce Tobacco Sales to Minors (Grant ID# 24784, May 2000)
- Higher Cost of Cigarettes Would Deter Young Smokers (Grant ID# 22932, May 2000)
- Prohibiting Tobacco Sales to Minors May Have Little Impact (Grant ID# 22928, May 2000)
- Tobacco Marketing Linked to Start of Adolescent Smoking (Grant ID# 24413, May 2000)