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New Poll Shows 71% of New York Voters Support Restoring Funding For Tobacco Prevention Programs

State cut tobacco prevention funding by more than 50% in recent years despite collecting billions in tobacco revenue

ALBANY (March 5, 2012) – A new statewide survey released today shows that New York voters oppose the recent cuts to the state’s tobacco prevention program and strongly favor using some of the state’s tobacco tax and settlement money to restore funding for programs to prevent kids from starting to smoke and help smokers quit.

Seven out of ten New York voters (71 percent) believe the state should use some of its tobacco tax and settlement money to restore funding for tobacco prevention programs to \$54 million per year, which is what it was two years ago. Support for funding the program comes from a broad-based coalition of voters, including strong majorities of Republicans (65 percent), independents (66 percent) and Democrats (77 percent). Just 21 percent of voters oppose restoring some of the funding for tobacco prevention programs.

“We can spend a little now or a lot later,” said Julianne Hart, New York State Government Relations Director for the American Heart Association. “Even in these difficult budget times, voters recognize that tobacco prevention is a smart investment for New York that protects kids, saves lives and saves money by reducing tobacco-related health care costs.”

The poll of 710 New York voters was released today by a coalition of health groups including the American Cancer Society, the American Lung Association in New York, the American Heart Association and the Campaign for Tobacco-free Kids. The poll was funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

The poll also found:

- 64 percent of New York voters oppose the recent cuts to the state’s tobacco prevention program.
- 77 percent said that it was important for the state to use a portion of the tobacco tax and settlement money to fund tobacco prevention.
- Even after poll respondents were reminded of the state’s budget problems, by a ratio of more than 2-to-1 (65 percent to 28 percent) voters said that the state should restore the recent cuts to tobacco prevention funding rather than using the funds to pay for other programs or help balance the budget.
- By a wide margin, voters say that they are more likely to vote for a candidate who supports funding tobacco prevention programs (62 percent more likely to 13 percent less likely).

“This poll clearly shows that our state’s declining investment in programs that help smokers quit is not something New Yorkers want to see happen,” said Michael Seilback, VP Public Policy and

Communications at the American Lung Association in New York. "New York must restore this vital funding that will save lives and reduce tobacco-caused disease. With more than 25,000 New Yorkers still dying each year from tobacco, cutting funding and denying smokers the help they need to quit is unacceptable."

For years New York has been a pioneer in the fight against tobacco. It has the highest cigarette tax in the country, has a comprehensive smoke-free law that includes all workplaces and public places, and has had an effective, well-funded tobacco prevention program. As a result, it has reduced the adult and high school smoking rate to well below the national average.

However, the recent cuts to New York's tobacco prevention programs have put the state's progress at risk. In the past four years, New York has cut funding for tobacco prevention programs by 52 percent, from \$85.5 million to \$41.4 million. While the state's fiscal crisis caused budget cuts across state programs, the tobacco control program experienced disproportionately larger cuts than those endured by almost any other state program. New York currently spends less than 2 cents of every dollar in tobacco tax and settlement revenue to fight tobacco use.

"The life-saving tobacco prevention message is no longer reaching lower income New Yorkers, who have smoking rates almost twice as high as the more affluent. Without adequate support for a program that has the capacity to reach everyone, the burden of tobacco taxes and tobacco disease will increasingly fall on the most disadvantaged," said Russ Sciandra, New York State Director for Advocacy at the American Cancer Society.

New York now ranks 20th in the nation in funding programs to prevent kids from smoking and help smokers quit, spending just 16 percent of the \$254.3 million recommended by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), according to a recent report by leading public health organizations. In a recent visit to Albany, a top CDC official said that a Surgeon General's report being released on March 8 will underscore the effectiveness of state tobacco prevention programs such as the one in New York.

Despite progress made in reducing smoking, tobacco remains the leading preventable cause of death in New York, claiming about 25,400 lives each year and costing nearly \$8.2 billion annually in health care bills.

For more information on the poll results, please visit http://tfk.org/press_office/2012/new_york/.

A total of 710 interviews of a random sample of general election voters in New York were conducted by Global Strategy Group. The survey was conducted by landline telephone February 22-26, 2012. Voters were screened for likely participation in the November 2012 general election. To assure that the data are representative of the population, the results were checked against expected November 2012 turnout and weighted by key demographics when necessary based on GSG's projection of a likely November 2012 turnout. Overall results have a margin of error of +/- 3.7 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

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