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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Advocates to Gov., Legislature: Follow Doctor's Orders and Increase Funding for the Anti-Tobacco Program**

#### ***U.S. Surgeon General Prescribes More Funding for State Anti-Smoking Efforts as Large Majority of Residents Support More Spending to Combat Tobacco***

(Albany, NY) (March 8, 2012) – Advocates gathered at the capitol to share findings of the U.S. Surgeon General's latest report on youth smoking being released today in Washington. The report is critical of the inadequate amount states spend on their anti-tobacco programs. Advocates shared findings of the report and highlighted poll results that show an overwhelming majority of New Yorkers support a strong New York State Tobacco Control Program (TCP).

The American Cancer Society, American Heart Association, American Lung Association in NY and the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids called on the Legislature to reject Gov. Cuomo's proposed \$5 million cut to the TCP and instead increase the state's investment to \$54 million, the level it was two years ago. The program currently is budgeted at \$41 million and has been cut in half since 2008.

The 900-page Surgeon General's Report, Preventing Tobacco Use Among Youth and Young Adults, presents the scientific consensus on the causes, health impact and ways to prevent youth smoking. The report identifies tobacco industry marketing practices as a major contributor to youth smoking, and says that industry advertising and pricing policies continue to lure youth to smoking even as states like New York cut back their anti-smoking efforts. Setting out a vision for ending the tobacco epidemic among youth, the Surgeon General says, "Providing and sustaining sufficient funding for comprehensive community programs, statewide tobacco control programs, school-based policies and programs, and mass media campaigns must be a priority."

Citing "a large, robust, and consistent evidence base," from New York, among other states, the report concludes, "The evidence is sufficient to conclude that mass media campaigns, comprehensive community programs, and comprehensive statewide tobacco control programs can prevent the initiation of tobacco use and reduce its prevalence among youth."

The report says, "Numerous studies over many years have consistently concluded that comprehensive state tobacco control programs that include a range of coordinated and complementary strategies have been effective at not only reducing tobacco use by youth and young adults, but also have resulted in overall reductions in smoking prevalence and concomitant decreases in state spending on tobacco-related health care."

New Yorkers overwhelmingly support using revenue collected from tobacco sales to fight tobacco use. A poll released this week by the coalition of organizations found that seven out of 10 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, the level from two years ago.

Revenue is available to better fund the TCP. New York State takes in more than \$2 billion a year in tobacco taxes and payments resulting from the states' lawsuit against the tobacco companies. Consumers pay it all in the form of higher prices on every tobacco product. Gov. Cuomo has proposed closing a loophole by collecting taxes on roll-your-own tobacco, a move estimated to raise an additional \$18 million.

While smoking rates have declined among youth and in the general population, rates remain unchanged among poor and less educated population segments.

The TCP operates in every corner of the state. The program works in local communities to give smokers the one-on-one assistance they need to quit. It funds youth smoking prevention groups; the Smokers Quitline, free starter kits of nicotine patches for those who want to quit; as well as hard-hitting, effective media campaigns.

The toll tobacco takes on New York is devastating. More than 25,000 New Yorkers will die this year of smoking-related diseases and more than \$8.1 billion is spent on health care costs each year to treat smoking caused illnesses. Lost wages and productivity due to tobacco use total \$6.05 billion a year. The current adult smoking rate is 15.5 percent and the teen smoking rate is 12.6 percent.

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