

News

Email Print BOOKMARK Yahoo! Buzz

Study: Anti-tobacco campaign is working

Activists say taxes prevent teenage smoking

ADVERTISEMENT



> mouse over to learn more

meet the tools that work for your small business



By Richard Craver | Journal Reporter

Published: December 18, 2008

A study of North Carolina's tobacco-prevention programs found that they have made a significant dent in teenage and young-adult smoking in the past two years.

But some anti-smoking advocates cautioned yesterday that they don't consider the programs as the leading factor in the smoking reduction.

Instead, they credit higher prices -- mainly through increased cigarette taxes -- as a bigger contributor.

The study was conducted by the Tobacco Prevention and Evaluation program of the UNC School of Medicine for the N.C. Health and Wellness Trust Fund.

The fund gets about \$81 million a year from the landmark Master Settlement Agreement, or 25 percent of the state's share of the money. It spends about \$17 million a year on prevention and cessation programs aimed at teenagers and college students, and on QuitlineNC, a telephone-support service for people wanting to quit.

Young adults 18 to 24 have the highest smoking rate of any age group in the state.

Most states are not spending enough of their money on tobacco prevention, said Dr. Adam Goldstein, the director of the UNC tobacco program.

"But relative to other major tobacco-producing states, our evaluation shows North Carolina's investment in youth-tobacco prevention is substantial, and the positive outcomes that have resulted are truly encouraging," Goldstein said.

According to a recent report from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, North Carolina is projected to spend \$18.5 million on tobacco-prevention in fiscal year 2008-09 -- about 17 percent of the CDC's annual spending target of \$106.8 million.

The UNC report found that cigarette use by high-school students in North Carolina has dropped from 20.3 percent in 2005 to 19 percent in 2007.

By comparison, the national level is 20 percent.



I need **affordable**
auto **insurance.**

My age is...



16-19
years old



20-24
years old



25-29
years old



30-34
years old



35-39
years old



40-49
years old



Use among middle-school students slipped from 5.8 percent in 2005 to 4.5 percent in 2007.

"More than four of five North Carolina youth reported awareness of the youth-focused tobacco-prevention media campaign -- Tobacco Reality Unfiltered -- or TRU," according to the report.

The report credits the trust fund with helping to get all 115 North Carolina school districts to adopt 100 percent tobacco-free policies by last summer. There are 17 community colleges and universities with similar policies, including Bennett College, Greensboro College, Guilford Technical Community College and Winston-Salem State University.

The report also found that during the third year of operation of QuitlineNC, there was a 31.5 percent increase in youth calls and 63 percent increase among young adults.

Bill Godshall, the executive director of SmokeFree Pennsylvania, said he supports the fund's efforts.

Godshall closely tracks the states' spending of their MSA money.

But he believes that the 30-cent increase in the state's cigarette tax has contributed more to the smoking reduction in youth and adults "than did all the tobacco settlement-funded programs combined," he said. There was a 25-cent tax increase in September 2005 and a 5-cent increase in July 2006.

An average of about 800 million packs of cigarettes were sold in North Carolina from 2001 through 2005. After the cigarette-tax increases went into effect, sales dropped to 693 million packs in 2007.

"Raising the cigarette tax by another \$1 a pack is the easiest way for North Carolina to further reduce cigarette consumption among North Carolina youth and adults," Godshall said.

Danny McGoldrick, the vice president of research for the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, encourages raising the state's cigarette tax by \$1, but he also said that the fund's efforts are encouraging.

Tommy Payne, the executive vice president of public affairs for Reynolds American Inc., the parent company of R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Co., said that as a result of the MSA payments, "states have more money available than ever before that could be spent on preventing and reducing youth smoking, and addressing other health-related matters."

"Yet many states continue to spend those monies on other things. It seems disingenuous that while doing that, legislators continue to consider and pass exorbitant cigarette excise-tax increases," Payne said.



Goldstein said that the report's main recommendations are to:

- Increase financing of the health and wellness trust fund and its initiatives.
- Focus on young adults who are not in college.
- Reduce young people's exposure to secondhand smoke.
- Increase efforts to help adult smokers quit.

"We want to raise a generation of North Carolina kids who are less likely to be exposed to tobacco, which we believe will have significant ramifications in terms of reduced health-care costs well down the line," Goldstein said.

- Richard Craver can be reached at 727-7376 or at rcraver@wsjournal.com.
-