

Tobacco-free initiative called a success

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CHAPEL HILL -- A program aimed at reducing tobacco use among North Carolina college students was successful in its first year of operation, according to an evaluation by UNC researchers.

The Tobacco-Free Colleges Initiative, established by the N.C. Health and Wellness Trust Fund in January 2006, has awarded grants to 20 organizations on 58 college campuses across the state.

"They really were able to rapidly diffuse funding, and there was a great interest from the outset of the initiative," said Adam Goldstein, a professor of family medicine and director of UNC's Tobacco Prevention and Evaluation Program.

The evaluation by the program -- based in the UNC School of Medicine's Department of Family Medicine -- found that grant recipients worked on 58 different campuses in 44 counties across the state to establish tobacco use prevention coalitions, advance tobacco-free policies and promote the use of Quitline N.C., a program that provides free, one-on-one support for young adults trying to quit smoking.

"There was documentation that an increasing number of young adults had begun to call the state quit line and want to quit smoking," Goldstein said. "And one of the goals of the initiative is to encourage and help college kids who want to quit smoking. The numbers show that the Health and Wellness Trust initiative appears to be successful and moving in the right direction."

Young adults ages 18 to 24 represent the largest smoking population at 28 percent, and there has been little change in those rates in the last decade, Goldstein said.

"Very few states have dedicated substantial resources toward a statewide movement on colleges and for young adults," he said. "The Health and Wellness Trust Fund moved appropriately in this direction and the outcome for the first year -- and probably the second year will be even stronger."

The evaluation cites the adoption of 16 tobacco-related policies, including three "100 percent tobacco-free" campus policies at Barber Scotia University, Gardner-Webb University and College of the Albemarle.

Support from a broad variety of campus leaders, Goldstein said, has been vital to the initiative's success.

"For instance, we found that over 900 key decision makers and organizing campus community members offered formal support for advancing the policies," he said. "Our evaluation shows it appears to be a broad-based effort originating from the [colleges'] leadership and from campus members."

Last October, UNC Hospitals joined with Duke Medicine, Rex Healthcare and WakeMed in pledging to make all its facilities tobacco-free beginning July 4.

UNC Hospitals' no-smoking policy eliminates the use of tobacco in all facilities, including outside buildings, in parking decks and in personal vehicles.

Tobacco use is the nation's leading cause of cancer and cardiovascular and respiratory diseases. The National Toxicology Program estimates that at least 250 chemicals in secondhand smoke are known to be toxic or carcinogenic.