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Contact: Connie Fedor
608-332-5201

New Poll Results Show Broad Support for Tobacco Tax Increase and Tobacco Prevention Efforts *Measures Would Reduce Smoking Among Wisconsin Kids*



MADISON – New poll results released today by a coalition of health groups show that nearly two-thirds of Wisconsinites support increasing the state’s cigarette tax by \$1.25 per pack.



Sixty-four percent of Wisconsin voters support increasing the state’s cigarette tax by \$1.25 per pack as part of an effort to expand access to health care for children and the uninsured. This support comes from a broad cross section of voters, including majorities of Democrats and Republicans, men and women, and all age groups.



A \$1.25 cigarette tax increase would prevent an estimated 84,000 Wisconsin children from becoming smokers, one in three of whom would eventually die as a result. It would also encourage 42,500 current adult smokers to quit.



“We knew it was smart health policy to substantially increase tobacco taxes, this poll is strong confirmation that it is smart politics as well,” said Maureen Busalacchi, Executive Director of Smoke Free Wisconsin, which commissioned the poll along with the American Cancer Society, the American Heart Association, and Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. The groups are part of a coalition advocating for a tobacco tax increase to fund critical health programs in Wisconsin.



“This isn’t a political issue, it’s a health care issue,” said John Foley, Vice President of Health Services with Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield in Wisconsin. “Approximately 70 percent of health care costs are related to chronic disease, and that is expected to rise, putting further pressure on the overall cost of health care.”



The poll was conducted jointly by prominent Democratic and Republican polling firms The Mellman Group and Public Opinion Strategies. In addition to finding strong support for tobacco tax increases, the poll also found strong support for increasing state funding for tobacco prevention, including sixty-five percent support for a proposal to create a tobacco prevention endowment through bond refinancing.

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The results are consistent with past polls in Wisconsin and around the country showing support for tobacco tax increases and other strategies that are proven to reduce tobacco-caused death and disease. However, this poll was the first test of public support for specific proposals championed by Governor Jim Doyle, who has included both a \$1.25 cigarette tax increase and increased funding for tobacco prevention and the tobacco prevention endowment in his state budget proposal to legislators. Both Republican and Democratic state legislators have championed efforts in recent years to increase tobacco taxes and funding for tobacco prevention.

“We know there is bipartisan support for increasing the tobacco tax and creating the tobacco prevention endowment,” said Busalacchi. “We urge every legislator to back these critical efforts to protect our kids and our health.”

Increasing tobacco taxes is proven to be the most effective single strategy for reducing tobacco use, especially among our kids. The impact is maximized and sustained by adequately funded tobacco prevention and cessation programs.

Tobacco is the number one preventable cause of death and disease in Wisconsin and the country. Every year in Wisconsin, tobacco use kills more than 8,000 people and accounts for more than \$2 billion in health care costs. Direct government costs due to smoking far exceed the tobacco tax and result in a hidden annual tax of \$603 for every Wisconsin household.

The statewide poll included a random sample of 500 Wisconsin voters. It was conducted from February 17-19 and has a margin of error of +/- 4.4 percentage points. Separate results on smoke-free indoor air policy from the same poll were released previously.