



Governor Doyle Zeroes in on State's Top Killer with Fiscally Responsible Health Policy

For Immediate release

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MADISON –Gov. Jim Doyle has taken an enormous step toward addressing the single largest threat to Wisconsin health and its economy, says a leader of Wisconsin's largest public health coalition.

“By just raising the cigarette tax, we can help more than 125,000 people escape from tobacco, two thirds of whom are children who won't take up the habit in the first place,” said Maureen Busalacchi, Executive Director of SmokeFree Wisconsin. “It's the single most effective public health care policy this legislature can enact.”

Tobacco-related disease last year killed 8,000 people in Wisconsin -- ten times more than traffic accidents – remaining Wisconsin's deadliest and costliest killer. Gov. Doyle proposed two significant actions to combat smoking-related diseases in his budget proposal Tuesday. Gov. Doyle made good on his promise to raise the tax on a pack of cigarettes by \$1.25 – and to create a permanent fund to finance anti-tobacco programs.

Governor Doyle's proposal to create a Healthy Wisconsin Fund with refinanced bonds, gives the legislature a second chance to do what's right, use the settlement money Wisconsin received from the big tobacco companies to help smokers quit and stop kids from starting to smoke.

“We applaud the Governor's commitment to ensure this money is locked away, only to be used to fully fund Wisconsin's tobacco control and prevention efforts,” Busalacchi said. “Governor Doyle showed he is serious about controlling healthcare costs by zeroing in on the financial and health care consequences of smoking.”

Raising the cigarette tax and ensuring smokers will have the help they need to quit is also good business for the state and for its economy, she added. Smoking-related diseases cost more than \$2 billion a year to treat, about one-fifth of all the health care premium dollars paid by businesses and individuals in Wisconsin.

“Gov. Doyle’s proposal is targeted, it is fair, it is good for business, in addition to being essential health care policy,” she said. “We urge lawmakers from both parties to support it.”

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