



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: January 17, 2014

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**(Corrected copy) Alaska tobacco program efforts honor 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Surgeon General's report on smoking**

*Strategies focus on potential to end the tobacco epidemic, still a challenge for the state*

ANCHORAGE — It was 1964. The Beatles landed in New York, *Mary Poppins* was a hit movie, Ford introduced the Mustang, and the U.S. Surgeon General released the first Surgeon General's Report on Smoking and Health.

The fight to end tobacco use has come a long way in the past 50 years. According the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the United States has cut smoking rates by more than half (from 42 percent in 1965 to 18 percent today) and per capita consumption of cigarettes by more than 70 percent. While smoking was allowed almost everywhere in 1964, today nearly half the nation's population is protected by statewide and local smoke-free laws that apply to all workplaces, restaurants and bars. Reductions in smoking have saved millions of lives and are responsible for 30 percent of the increase in the life expectancy of Americans since 1964.

However, the battle is far from over. According to the CDC, tobacco use is still the No. 1 cause of preventable death in the United States. Smoking kills more than 480,000 Americans each year, sickens millions more and costs the nation \$289 billion annually in health care expenditures and lost productivity. About 44 million adults still smoke, and more than 3,200 kids try their first cigarette each day.

Over the past 14 years, Alaska has made great strides by committing to a comprehensive tobacco prevention and control program, which, thanks to our governors and Legislature, is funded close to the level recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

“Alaska is setting an example for the nation with its strong and sustained commitment to fighting tobacco use,” said Matthew L. Meyers, president of the national Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. “Alaska's efforts are paying off by preventing kids from smoking, saving lives, and saving money by reducing tobacco-related health care costs.”

Results of Alaska's effort include:

- Alaska's high school youth smoking rate has declined 40 percent between 2007 and 2013 (17.8 to 10.6 percent), and 70 percent since 1995 (36.5 to 10.6 percent).
- In 2012, only 21 percent of Alaska adults smoked, down from 28 percent in 1996.
- The Alaska Federation of Natives and 84 tribes in Alaska have passed smoke-free and tobacco-free resolutions.
- About half of Alaska's population is covered by smokefree workplace laws with the strongest worker protection in Anchorage, Nome and Palmer. Barrow, Bethel, Dillingham, Haines, Juneau, Klawock, Petersburg, Sitka, Skagway and Unalaska have also passed smokefree workplace laws.
- Alaska school districts are partners in this battle, with 20 districts having adopted comprehensive tobacco-free campus policies.
- Ten of the 14 members of the Alaska Association of Housing Authorities are protecting their residents with smoke-free housing policies.
- Local tobacco taxes have been raised in several communities to deter youth initiation, one of the most effective steps in protecting Alaska youth from becoming smokers.
- Alaska's vendor sales to youth are at an all-time low, at 4.2 percent (preliminary rate), down from a high of 34 percent in 1996.

The Alaska Tobacco Prevention and Control program's current anti-tobacco campaign is being enacted by 28 local and regional grantees (including Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation, Tanana Chiefs Conference, Alaska Family Services and SouthEast Regional Health Consortium), impacting more than 200 communities across the state. Grantees work as regional coalitions, addressing each region's specific needs and providing tools and assistance to all tribes, schools, organizations, and residents to implement proven public health strategies designed to reduce tobacco's impact and close the gap on tobacco-use disparities between urban and rural populations.

"Alaska has made tremendous progress in reducing smoking use," said Dr. Ward Hurlburt, Alaska's chief medical officer. "But it is unacceptable that tobacco still kills and sickens so many people, and places such a huge financial burden on our society. On this 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Surgeon General's report, it's time for our nation and our state to take strong action to end the tobacco epidemic. We know how to do it, and we cannot afford to wait another 50 years."

A complete copy of the Surgeon General's report is available at:

<http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/reports/50-years-of-progress/index.html>

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Corrections include:

Smoking rate rounded down to 42 percent from 42.4 percent.

Number of kids that try their first cigarette each day adjusted from 3,000 to 3,200.

Smoking kills more than 480,000 Americans each year, adjusted from 440,000.

Smoking costs the nation \$289 billion each year, adjusted from \$193 billion.

Alaska Tribes that have passed smokefree or tobacco-free resolutions is 84, adjusted from 75.