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Analysis Shows That Linking Proposed Cigarette Tax Hike to Services to Help Smokers Quit Would Save Lives and Reduce Health-Care Costs

The University of Wisconsin Center for Tobacco Research and Intervention (UW-CTRI) today released figures projecting the Wisconsin health and economic benefits that would result from a proposed 75-cent cigarette excise tax hike. Gov. Jim Doyle is expected to call for such a tax increase as part of his biennial budget recommendations to be released this evening.

“Wisconsin spends more than \$3 billion each year in extra health-care costs to treat illness and disease directly caused by tobacco use,” said Dr. Michael Fiore, UW-CTRI director.

“Raising the cigarette excise tax by 75 cents means that adult smoking would decline by nearly 3 percent and youth smoking would decline by nearly 10 percent. The 75-cent increase will result in almost 30,000 fewer youth smokers, cause 25,000 current smokers to quit, and ultimately prevent 15,000 premature deaths,” he said. “Right now, 19.6 percent of the state population smokes. The majority of those smokers actually want to beat their addiction, and could use some assistance to do it.”

Fiore said pairing stop-smoking assistance with the tax increase would provide both the added incentive for smokers to quit and the tools to help them succeed. Devoting \$23 million to the state’s tobacco-control program is just 3 percent of what smokers will pay in a new cigarette tax. A 75-cent tax bump would generate total annual revenue from smokers in Wisconsin to \$765 million.

Fiore draws his figures from an analysis done by economist Frank Chaloupka at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Through the Department of Health Services, UW-CTRI manages the 1-800-QUIT-NOW Wisconsin Tobacco Quit Line. The Quit Line provides personalized coaching and a free two-week starter kit of stop-smoking medication.

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