



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Raise It for Health ND coalition delivers over 22,000 signatures to support ballot initiative to increase North Dakota's tobacco tax

(Bismarck, ND) – Coalition members of the Raise it for Health North Dakota coalition delivered over 22,000 signatures to the North Dakota Secretary of State today to support a ballot initiative to increase North Dakota's tobacco tax and dedicate new revenues to address unmet veterans' and behavioral health needs in the state. State law requires 13,452 validated and approved signatures before the petition would become a measure on the General Election ballot in November 2016.

"We are overwhelmed by the response from North Dakotans to this initiative. More than 150 volunteers pitched in to collect significantly more signatures than what we needed," said Kristie Wolff, Tobacco Control Manager with the American Lung Association in North Dakota, at a press conference in Bismarck.

She added, "That's a sign of the strength of our coalition as well as the public's continued support for our kids, veterans, and individuals struggling with serious health conditions, mental illness, and addiction disorders."

If approved, the measure would increase the excise tax on cigarettes from \$0.44 per pack to \$2.20 pack and on tobacco products, including liquid nicotine, from 28% to 56% of the wholesale purchase price. New revenues generated from the proposed increase, estimated at over \$200 million for the first biennium, would be dedicated to fund crucial health care services and programs for our state's veterans and those struggling with mental illness, addiction disorders, and chronic disease.

No money would be used for tobacco prevention, as North Dakota is the only state in the nation to have a fully-funded at CDC recommended level statewide comprehensive tobacco prevention and control program which is funded through a small percentage of the dollars awarded to North Dakota as a part of the Master Tobacco Settlement Agreement.

Dr. Eric Johnson, chairman of the sponsoring committee and a Grand Forks physician, included in a statement, "Increasing the price of tobacco is proven to be the most effective way to prevent youth from ever starting, and this initiative is estimated to reduce youth smoking rates by 20%, preventing 5,800 youth from ever starting. If passed, this will be one of the most significant public health interventions ever undertaken in our state with respect to the lives saved through reduced smoking, those who will never start, and the savings in health care costs that will be realized as a result."

The proposed increase would bring North Dakota's cigarette tax in line with our neighboring states, which average \$2.08 per pack. North Dakota last increased its tobacco taxes in 1993 and ranks 47th in the nation for cigarette excise tax rates.

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