

Tri-Town joins nationwide effort to help smokers quit

On Tuesday, March 1, more than 100 local, state and national leaders gathered at the Rhode Island Convention Center for a statewide summit to identify strategies to reduce smoking in Rhode Island by providing smokers with the tools and support they need to quit smoking. Included in the summit was Johnston-based Tri-Town Community Action.

Dr. Howard Koh, assistant secretary of Health and Human Services for the Obama Administration, gave the keynote address, urging attendees to create an integrated system of outreach, care and treatment that will one day provide all Rhode Island smokers with the resources they need to quit whenever they are ready and for as many times as it may take to remain permanently smoke-free.

Other speakers included Lt. Gov. Elizabeth Roberts; State Representative Eileen Naughton; Seema Dixit, Manager, Tobacco Control Program, RI Dept. of Health; Elena Nicoletta, Medicaid Office, RI Dept. of Human Services; Dr. Mack Joluston, Chief Medical Officer, Neighborhood Health Plan of RI; and Christopher Koller, RI Health Insurance Commissioner.

The urgency around tobacco treatment is as much about reducing health care costs as it is about public health. According to the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, tobacco-caused health care costs amount to \$506 million each year in Rhode Island, of which \$179 million is covered by the state's

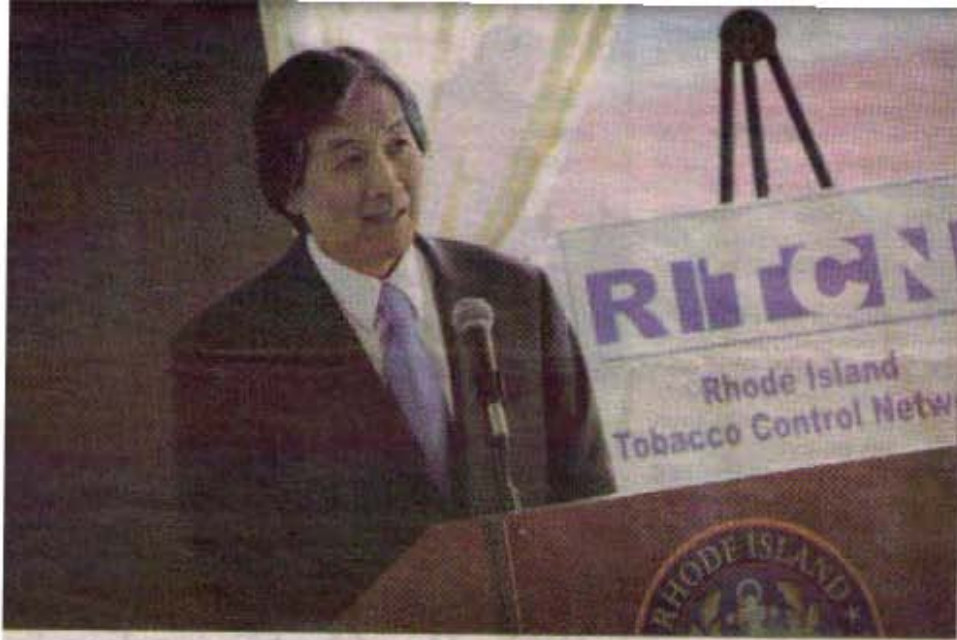
Medicaid program.

Despite major gains in tobacco control over the past decade, tobacco use remains the top cause of preventable death and disease in Rhode Island, with over 1,600 premature deaths each year attributed to tobacco use. It is estimated that 15.1 percent (124,700) of adults in Rhode Island are smokers. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 70 percent of adult smokers want to quit, but the desire and intention to quit often fall short in the face of this deadly addiction, particularly if they attempt quitting without counseling and medication.

The summit was organized by the Rhode Island Tobacco Control Network (www.RITCN.org), and co-sponsors included the American Lung Association in RI, the American Heart Association, the American Cancer Society and the RI Department of Health. Funding was provided by the national Partnership for Prevention as part of its grant to a New England Cessation Policy Collaborative.

SMOKE AND MIRRORS:

Dr. Howard Koh, assistant secretary for Health at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, gives his keynote address for the Rhode Island Tobacco Cessation Summit.



LEADING THE SUMMIT: RITCN Steering and Planning Committee members are (from left) Gertrude Jones, Nancy Clark, Astrid Berg, Howard Koh, Walter Harper, Stephen DeTroy, Susan Roberts, Megan Tucker and Robert Crisman.



RESOURCES TO QUIT: Tri-Town staff members Donna Levesque, a tobacco treatment specialist, and Health Center Director Matthew Roman talk over tobacco treatment for uninsured Rhode Islanders. (Photos courtesy of Al Weems)