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Rhode Island Gets Mixed Grades in Annual Tobacco Control Report

With an "F" and a "D", RI falls short in protecting residents from tobacco-caused disease and death

(Providence, RI) –Rhode Island failed to protect children from Big Tobacco’s marketing tactics by neglecting to invest in programs and policies proven to reduce tobacco use according to the American Lung Association’s [State of Tobacco Control 2013](#) report released today. While the report praises Rhode Island for having the second highest cigarette tax in the nation and commends the state for its strong smokefree indoor air laws, the state again received an “F” for inadequately funding its tobacco control program and a “D” for cessation coverage. The report gave Rhode Island a “thumbs down” for spending little state money on tobacco prevention and cessation programs despite smoking costing the state close to \$870 million in economic costs each year.

The Lung Association’s annual State of Tobacco Control® report tracks progress on key tobacco control policies at the federal and state level, assigning grades based on whether laws are adequately protecting citizens from the enormous toll tobacco use takes on lives and the economy.

The 11th annual report shows how money is often at the root of the leading cause of preventable death, as state and federal policymakers are failing to battle a deep-pocketed, ever-evolving tobacco industry.

Rhode Island received the following grades for 2013:

Tobacco Prevention Control and Spending	F
Smokefree Air	A
Cigarette Tax	A
Cessation	D

“While Rhode Island boasts comprehensive indoor smokefree air laws and a high cigarette tax, this report drives home the point that doing well in one or two areas is not enough,” said Jeff Seyler, President and CEO of the American Lung Association of the Northeast. “To be most effective in preventing kids from smoking and save the most lives, Rhode Island needs to significantly boost funding for the state’s tobacco control program and cessation coverage.”

Tobacco causes an estimated 1,696 deaths in Rhode Island annually and costs the state’s economy more than \$869 million in healthcare costs and lost productivity, a tremendous burden that the state can ill afford.

Although Rhode Island receives \$185 million in tobacco-related revenue annually, the state invests only \$376,437 on tobacco prevention and cessation programs. The failure of states across the U.S. to invest in policies and programs to reduce tobacco use has resulted in 3 million new youth and

young smokers in the United States, according to the Surgeon General's 2012 [report](#). The theme of this year's State of Tobacco Control report is "Follow the Money." The Lung Association is urging state governments to weigh the real costs tobacco use has on public health as well as the state healthcare system.

"We urge Governor Chafee and the Rhode Island Legislature to restore tobacco prevention and control funding so we can keep kids from starting to smoke and help current smokers quit," said Katie King, the American Lung Association of the Northeast's Director of Public Policy in Rhode Island. "Too many lives are lost each year because of tobacco and its incumbent upon the state of Rhode Island to dedicate more of the tobacco revenue it receives to ending this terrible burden."

Tobacco companies continue to introduce and promote new products, such as candy-flavored cigars and dissolvable tobacco products. Youth, low-income populations, and members of the Hispanic and LGBT communities who smoke cigars are more likely to smoke flavored cigars, according to a recent [study](#) in *Nicotine and Tobacco Research*. Meanwhile, the sales and popularity of these tobacco products have surged in large part due to their cheaper price. Each day, roughly 3,000 youth smoke a cigar for the first time.

Priorities that need to be addressed to improve Rhode Island's State of Tobacco Control grades include:

- Increasing Fiscal Year 2014 funding for tobacco control programs under Rhode Island Executive Office of Health and Human Services at \$3.1 million, one step closer to the \$15.2 million level recommended by CDC.
- Increase the cigarette tax by 90 cents per pack. This will prevent 2,900 youth from becoming addicted to tobacco, motivate 3,700 smokers to quit for good, and generate \$15.6 million in new revenue each year to be dedicated back to tobacco control programs.
- Eliminate barriers to cessation coverage for Medicaid and state health plan enrollees. Some plans include limits on duration, annual limits on quit attempts and some require the use of certain cessation treatments before others.

"Keeping the price of tobacco products high saves lives," said Karina Wood, Director of the Rhode Island Tobacco Control Network. "Increasing the tax on cigarettes by 90 cents will prevent 2,900 kids in Rhode Island from becoming addicted to nicotine and motivate 3,700 current smokers to quit."

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About the American Lung Association of the Northeast

The American Lung Association of the Northeast serves CT, MA, ME, NH, NY, RI and VT. We are part of the American Lung Association, the oldest voluntary health organization in the U.S. Established in 1904 to combat tuberculosis; our mission today is to save lives by improving lung health and preventing lung disease. The focus is on air quality, asthma, tobacco control, and all lung disease. www.LungNE.org

About the Rhode Island Tobacco Control Network

The Rhode Island Tobacco Control Network is a statewide advocacy coalition of over 50 member organizations and individuals fighting to reduce tobacco use. The mission of the Network is to educate, mobilize, and protect all Rhode Island residents from the destructive effects of nicotine addiction and commercial tobacco use. www.ritcn.org