



## N.J. 'unfriendly' to smokers trying to quit

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By **Star-Ledger Editorial Board**

The American Lung Association ranks New Jersey among the five least “quit-friendly” states in the nation for people trying to stop smoking. The **American Cancer Society recently called the state’s investment in anti-smoking programs “embarrassing.”**

What’s going on here?

Just a few years ago, New Jersey boasted a model tobacco control program, funded by the cigarette tax and billions from a legal settlement with U.S. tobacco makers.

Then Gov. **Chris Christie slashed almost all state funding** for programs helping smokers quit and keeping teens from starting. Today, New Jersey ranks 46th in the nation for funding these programs.

The lost funding for smoking cessation couldn’t have come at a worse time, said physician Michael Steinberg, director of the Tobacco Dependence Program at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey.

Squeezed by the poor economy and the high cost of smokes, more people are feeling financial pressure to quit — and getting little help.

“They are going to continue to use tobacco. They are going to continue to get tobacco-caused diseases. And the majority either have no insurance or are covered under Medicaid, which is paid for by the taxpayers,” said Steinberg, who continued running his program on a voluntary basis after his funding was cut.

Nationally speaking, New Jersey’s smoking rates are relatively low. Yet more than 11,000 New Jersey adults still die of tobacco-related causes each year.

Christie moved most of the \$7.5 million that funded tobacco control programs last year into the general fund for a reason: to plug the gaping budget hole.



Karen Bleier/Getty Images

A man smokes a cigarette in this 2011 file photo.

That may seem logical, but it's also short-sighted: A study last year found New Jersey's economy loses \$30.29 per pack sold, taking lost wages, early death and health care expenses into account.

And since smokers are disproportionately low-income, the move highlights (again) Christie's willingness to lean on the most vulnerable residents to solve the state's fiscal problems.

And that's cause for embarrassment.



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