

## Anti-smoking efforts could save N.J. economy money, study says

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Susan K. Livio/Statehouse Bureau



AP Photo/File

A man smokes in this 2007 file photo.

**TRENTON** — Doctors have long advised their smoking patients that kicking the nicotine habit could save their lives. A study released today says helping others to quit will also save the state's economy money.

The average pack of smokes in the Garden State costs \$7.48, but it really costs the residents and the state's economy \$30.29 per pack when lost wages, premature death and health care expenses are factored in, according to an analysis by researchers at Penn State University.

For every dollar spent on medications, nicotine replacement therapy like the skin patch, and counseling, New Jersey saves as much as \$2.62 because fewer employees miss work and suffer from smoking-related illnesses, according to the study released by the American Lung Association of the Mid-Atlantic region of Delaware, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

The message hits home in New Jersey, where Gov. Chris Christie gutted the state Department of Health and Senior Services programs in schools, online and by hotline to save \$7.5 million to reduce the state's budget deficit.

More than 10,000 people last year used the state's hotline, online counseling services and clinics to stop smoking, according to NJ BREATHEs. The money also supports 170 high school and 119 middle school anti-tobacco groups and has helped cut teen smoking rates in half.

New Jersey once dedicated \$30 million a year to anti-tobacco efforts.

Deb Brown, CEO of the American Lung Association of the Mid-Atlantic, said she hopes the governor and legislature read the study and reconsider the state's "unique" status in the country for allocating no public funds on anti-smoking efforts.

"This study shows it really is important to put money into prevention. It saves money in the long run," Brown said. "Many states are facing a budget crisis. This study shows a dollar on prevention goes a long way."

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Smoking costs the state \$8.3 billion, including \$3.6 billion in health care expenses, \$2.8 billion for the number of lives it claims, and \$1.8 billion in lost wages, according to the analysis.

There are 1.18 million smokers in New Jersey, the report said.

With the state's anti-tobacco funding gone, the state dedicated \$318,000 of its cancer prevention money on anti-smoking efforts to keep its "quitline" hot-line operating, offering nicotine-replacement therapies, like the skin patch, among other efforts, state health spokeswoman Dawn Thomas said. The state money allows New Jersey to qualify for \$1.2 million in matching funds from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, she said.

The study was paid for by a grant from Pfizer, Inc., which manufactures smoking cessation drugs.

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