

Op-Ed: Budget cuts could snuff anti-smoking efforts

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BY EDWARD KAZIMIR

The Record

Edward Kazimir was instrumental in forming New Jersey's Comprehensive Tobacco Control Program and managed its Tobacco Dependence Treatment program.

LIKE ALMOST every state, New Jersey has woken up to a fiscal nightmare. Governor Christie's administration has put forward a bold plan to eliminate \$10.7 billion from New Jersey's massive \$38 billion budget for 2011.

While wasteful spending must end, many popular and effective programs are in jeopardy. Funding for tobacco prevention initiatives accounts for a relatively small share of the state's budget, but such funding has a significant positive impact on health and helps reduce health care related expenditures.

We can't afford to squander the impressive progress made so far. The Comprehensive Tobacco Control Program has been successful in enacting and enforcing anti-smoking laws and policies. New Jersey has fostered an atmosphere in which tobacco use is socially unacceptable, helping the state achieve one of the lowest smoking rates among adults in the country (one in eight New Jersey residents is a smoker).

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Restrictions on smoking in bars, restaurants and other public establishments have enabled everyone to breathe easier.

The control program has a history of success in preventing young people from starting to smoke and helping smokers who want to stop quit.

Begun in 2000, the CTCP has footprints in all 21 counties and has spearheaded successful youth-targeted programs like Reaching Everyone By Exposing Lies (REBEL) for high school students, REBEL 2 for middle schoolers and Rebels On Campus (ROCS) for college students. All three groups have more than 300 chapters and 11,000 members.

Youth smoking halved

Among the CTCP's notable achievements is a 50 percent reduction in the number of cigarettes smoked by New Jersey's youth between 1999 and 2006.

The CTCP's work also includes restrictions on smoking in public places, funding quit centers (aiding more than 10,000 clients) and quit lines (assisting more than 100,000 residents), and providing support for grass

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roots anti-smoking organizations.

As a result, adult smoking prevalence declined and a national report released in 2009 found that New Jersey had the highest proportion of ex-smokers of any state.

It's well documented that tobacco use has dire health and economic consequences. In our state alone, nearly 12,000 adults die every year from tobacco use, which is the leading cause of preventable death. An estimated 10,300 New Jersey kids become new daily smokers each year and 15.9 percent of our state's adults smoke.

The financial impact is huge: \$3.17 billion is spent annually on smoking-related health care costs in New Jersey. The state loses \$2.5 billion a year in lost productivity attributed to cigarette smoking.

Supporting smoking cessation initiatives is one of the most cost-effective methods of reducing health costs and risks.

From Florida to California and states elsewhere, experience shows the effectiveness of tobacco control programs diminishes — often drastically — when funding is cut.

Declining smoking rates reversed course and in some instances increased among all demographic groups within states after allocations for tobacco control programs were curtailed or eliminated.

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In Minnesota, for example, an increase in youth smokers was detected six months after the state trimmed spending on tobacco control. Often the setback in the battle against tobacco use can be traced to a lack of services for people who want to quit and need help to accomplish the goal.

A critical difference

Access to smoking cessation services, including the affordable availability of medications to overcome nicotine dependence, have made a critical difference in whether smokers succeed in quitting.

The once iconic Marlboro Man may have ridden off into the sunset but his successors stand ready to take his place. The tobacco industry spends an estimated \$226.3 million a year marketing its products in New Jersey, according to the American Lung Association.

New Jersey needs to counteract Big Tobacco's marketing messages.

While the Christie administration has espoused a commitment to preserving New Jersey's efforts to promote smoking cessation, how can it be carried out effectively without funding programs that

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have been shown to be successful, such as the CTCP?

The status quo could deteriorate if funding for tobacco control dries up. Adult and youth smoking rates would almost certainly spike because a very large percentage of smokers — estimated at more than 90 percent in some studies — can't quit without help.

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