



Feature Column

Towards A Healthier Arkansas

A Message from the Arkansas Department of Health

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SPECIAL EDITION

The Cost of a Pack of Cigarettes

(Little Rock) – Discussions around the state today are focusing on how to fund healthcare in our state, and right at the center of the battle is talk of an increase on the tax on tobacco products. That seems very appropriate, since tobacco use has so profoundly affected the cost of healthcare and the burden of chronic disease in our state. Healthcare providers, insurance companies, government agencies, concerned citizens—all of us have tried to find ways to reduce the use of tobacco in our state and the cost of treating the illness it causes. We need to prevent kids from starting, and more than that, we need to help people quit.

Reducing the use of tobacco, and, thereby, lowering the cost of treating the illnesses it causes, requires that a number of programs work together. No single approach will be as effective as a combined effort, according to research done by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Education is important; good law and law enforcement is important; and raising the cost is critical.

Something we've known for quite a while is that when the price of a pack of cigarettes goes up, for whatever reason, there is a corresponding decrease in cigarette and smokeless tobacco purchases. Published research findings show that a ten percent cigarette price increase reduces youth smoking rates by nine to fifteen per cent and adult rates by at least two per cent.

Studies also show us that the impact of a cost increase is especially powerful with kids who have low disposable incomes. We know that **ninety per cent** of all smokers started by the time they were nineteen. If we can help them avoid tobacco until they are adults, the chances are good that they will never start. Adults rarely start smoking.

The social cost of tobacco use to families and individuals in our state is staggering. Many Arkansans simply do not understand the connection between smoking and heart disease and

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stroke – all of which have been at the top of the list for causes of death in Arkansas for decades. Almost anyone in our state knows the story of a family member or friend who has suffered one of these diseases, or one of the other deadly results of tobacco use – lung cancer, oral cancer, or Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disorder (COPD). In human terms, there are few single personal choices that cost us as much as the addiction to tobacco. The fact is, more than half of the people who smoke today will die of a tobacco-related disease.

The costs to our healthcare system are even more clear-cut. Here are the facts:

- Overall, we spend more than \$629 million per year in tobacco-related health care costs.
- Smoking costs to the Arkansas Medicaid program are an estimated \$241.9 million per year: \$65.7 million in costs to the State and \$176.2 million to the federal government.
- Arkansas taxpayers pay approximately \$619.2 million per year in federal and state taxes to cover the smoking-related tax burden, and we lose \$1.3 billion per year in Arkansas workforce productivity due to premature death.

If we could spread the cost incurred by treating smoking related illness, that cost would amount to more than \$7.00 per pack!

Without regard to how we might spend any revenue that might be raised by a tax, raising the cost of cigarettes and smokeless tobacco is the right thing to do. The plan to apply that revenue to healthcare costs also seems like the right thing to do.

One of the most important calls a tobacco user can make is to the Arkansas Tobacco Quitline at 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669).

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