

House Revenue Committee  
February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2015  
**Support of HB 2555**

Chair Barnhart and Members of the House Revenue Committee:

The Coalition of Local Health Officials represents the 34 local public health departments in Oregon who work tirelessly to protect the public and prevent death and disease. The Coalition of Local Health Officials supports HB 2555, which would increase the tobacco tax.

The Coalition of Local Health Officials supports an increase in the tobacco tax with an increase in the percentage that is dedicated to tobacco prevention activities.

Tobacco use is a habit that begins early in life— Four in five adult smokers started before they were 18<sup>1</sup>. Significant increases in tobacco taxes are a highly effective tobacco control strategy especially among youth who are particularly sensitive to price increases. Nine percent of Oregon high school students smoke<sup>2</sup> and studies show that every 10 percent increase in cigarette prices leads to a seven percent reduction in youth smoking, and total cigarette consumption by about four percent.

Dedicating a portion of the tobacco tax revenue into the Tobacco Use Reduction Account to fund the Tobacco Prevention and Education Program is critical to continue to reduce tobacco use and improve the health of Oregonians. In Oregon, tobacco use remains the leading cause of death with 7,000 deaths due to tobacco-related illness, 650 deaths due to exposure to secondhand smoke, and costs Oregon more than 5 billion per biennium (this includes Oregon Health Plan costs). Americans consistently and overwhelmingly support, and even expect, tobacco tax revenue to be used for tobacco prevention and education programs, in order to help tobacco users quit, prevent youth from starting, and protect people from secondhand smoke.

Oregon's tobacco use rates have declined due in large part to Oregon's Tobacco Prevention and Education Program efforts at the state and local level. Through this program, all county health departments in Oregon receive some of the current cigarette tax revenue, which funds local tobacco prevention efforts.

Public Health research shows that with successful and well-funded local tobacco prevention programs further decreases in tobacco use rates are possible. The benefits would include improving the overall health of the population, reducing health care costs, and reducing lost work-time and other employer costs. Tobacco taxation is one example of well-researched, evidence-based preventive health.

Thank you.

<sup>1</sup> Chuck Marr and Chye-Ching Huang. 2014. Higher tobacco taxes can improve health and raise revenue

<sup>2</sup> Oregon Healthy Teens Survey. 2013. Oregon Public Health Division

