



Testimony Supporting HB 2555

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Oregon Nurses Association

February 25, 2015

Chair Barnhart and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of HB 2555. The Oregon Nurses Association is proud to represent over 13,000 Oregon Nurses. Oregon Nurses make up the largest segment of Oregon's health care work force, and work in nearly every health care setting imaginable, from large hospitals to small local clinics, from corrections to school based health centers, and community-based public health.

Tobacco use is widely known to cause heart disease, diabetes, asthma, and cancer. Although Oregon's nurses and other health care providers have demonstrated that they are committed to stressing the importance of smoking cessation, the most important work we can do around tobacco prevention is preventing non-tobacco users from taking up tobacco, especially our children.

An increase in the cigarette tax will help to reduce smoking and saves lives, while also raising revenue that can be used to fund vital health care services and tobacco cessation and prevention programs.

Rates of smoking have been falling in Oregon and across the nation over the past decades as tobacco taxes have increased, but we can't allow our progress to curtail our future efforts. There could be 3 million fewer young smokers today if success in reducing youth tobacco use that was made between 1997 and 2003 had been sustained.

Despite overall reductions in the smoking rate, tobacco use remains the leading cause of preventable death in Oregon, claiming the lives of more than 6,000 Oregonians each year—more lives than car accidents, suicide, AIDS, and murder combined. In addition to this unnecessary loss of life, tobacco use costs the state more than \$2 billion each year in health costs and lost productivity.

An increase in the cigarette tax will help combat both of these issues: the higher cost will deter people from starting to smoke, and the revenue generated can help fund critical health services and tobacco cessation programs. An increase in the cigarette tax is especially important in deterring youth from starting to use tobacco products. Young people are especially price sensitive.

As direct care providers for many Oregonians who suffer from chronic illness as a result of smoking, and patients struggling to quit smoking, Oregon's nurses urge your support of HB 2555.