



TEXAS TOBACCO CONTROL PARTNERS

September 20, 2021

Dear Governor Abbott, Lt. Governor Patrick, Speaker Phelan, Chair Nelson and Chair Bonnen:

As you begin to distribute American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, **we ask you to use ARPA dollars to fund the tobacco prevention and cessation program with an additional \$6 million annually.** The epidemic of e-cigarettes impacting Texas youth continues and as the state confronts the COVID-19 pandemic, there has never been a more important time to help tobacco users quit.

Smoking & COVID-19

While Texas is facing unprecedented public health challenges, it is critical that programs to prevent kids from starting to use tobacco and help adults quit are not reduced. People who smoke or who used to smoke are at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19. Smoking is also a proven risk factor for cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and heart disease, which also put people at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19. The adverse health effects of smoking are well-documented, and COVID-19 has exacerbated this. The tobacco control funding included in the biennial budget that was recently passed into law represents a reduction in program funding by \$424,000 when compared to the funding level in the previous state fiscal year, encompassing a full reduction in the tobacco enforcement programⁱ. Texas tobacco control funding has seen consistent reductions in each of the previous five legislative sessions.

No matter when someone quits tobacco, there are large and immediate benefits—perhaps these benefits are as important now as ever. For some people who use tobacco products, COVID-19 might provide motivation to quit, and it has been reported that the Texas Quitline has seen an increase in calls during the pandemic; for others, trying to quit during a time of stress might be even harder. Texas should do everything we can to help those who try to quit to succeed. We must fund critical tobacco prevention and cessation programs.

Tobacco Control Funding in Texas

In 2021, Texas is expected to collect \$971 million in annual tobacco revenues from both tobacco settlement payments and state tobacco taxesⁱⁱ, yet the biennial budget passed by the Legislature and signed into law at the end of May only allocates \$9.2 million for tobacco prevention and cessation programsⁱⁱⁱ. This funding allocation is only 3% of the \$264 million recommended for Texas by the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)^{iv}. An additional \$6 million per year would bring program funding back to levels in the 2013-15 budget, before e-cigarette use exploded among Texas youth. Research shows that the more states spend on comprehensive tobacco control programs, the greater the reductions in smoking. The longer states invest in such programs, the greater and quicker the impact. When appropriately funded in accordance with CDC recommendations, comprehensive tobacco control programs can reduce tobacco use^v.

Health and Economic Costs of Tobacco Use in Texas

Tobacco is an addictive and deadly product. In Texas, nearly 15% of adults smoke^{vi}. Smoking harms nearly every organ in the body and increases the risk for many types of cancer, heart attack, stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), emphysema, chronic bronchitis and other diseases^{vii}. Tobacco use remains the nation's number one cause of preventable death. An estimated 28,000 deaths are caused by smoking each year in Texas^{viii}. Smoking is estimated to cost Texas \$8.85 billion in direct health care costs, including \$1.96 billion in Medicaid costs annually^{ix}.

Due to sharp increases in youth tobacco use in recent years, largely due to skyrocketing rates of e-cigarette use, the decades of progress that has been made in reducing tobacco use rates in youth is now in jeopardy. Here in Texas, 14.3% of high school students and 7.1% of middle school students reported using e-cigarette products in the last month^x. As the tobacco industry is evolving, the need for funding for tobacco prevention programs has never been greater. It's imperative that programs are funded to protect the next generation from a lifetime of addiction.

Please consider investing ARPA dollars to fund the state's tobacco prevention and cessation program with at least an additional \$6 million.

Sincerely,

American Lung Association
American Heart Association
American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network
Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids
Preventing Tobacco Addiction Foundation
Texas Medical Association
Texas Association of Family Physicians
Texas Public Health Coalition
The Cooper Institute

ⁱ Texas DSHS LAR FY 22-23

ⁱⁱ <https://comptroller.texas.gov/transparency/revenue/watch/general-revenue/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/87R/billtext/pdf/SB00001F.pdf#navpanes=0>

^{iv} <https://www.lung.org/research/sotc/state-grades/texas>

^v U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Health Consequences of Smoking—50 Years of Progress: A Report of the Surgeon General. Atlanta: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2014.

^{vi} Adult smoking data come from CDC's 2019 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. High school smoking and tobacco use rates are taken from the 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System. Middle school smoking (8th grade only) rates are taken from the 2020 Texas Youth Tobacco Survey.

^{vii} Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Health Effects of Cigarette Smoking. Updated April 28, 2020. https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/health_effects/effects_cig_smoking

^{viii} <https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/problem/toll-us/texas>

^{ix} <https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/problem/toll-us/texas>

^x Texas Youth Tobacco Survey (YTS), 2020, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas