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American Lung Association “State of Tobacco Control 2015” Report Calls on California to Increase Efforts to Eliminate Tobacco-Caused Death and Disease

Lung Association in California supplemental report grades all California cities and counties on tobacco control policies; Officials must take steps to achieve bold lifesaving goals, California coalition urges tobacco tax effort

(Los Angeles, CA, January 21, 2015) – Once a national leader in tobacco control efforts, progress is at a standstill in California as advances in statewide tobacco control policies have stagnated. These were the findings of the 13th annual American Lung Association *State of Tobacco Control 2015* report released today. Fifty-one years after the 1964 Surgeon General’s report which first sounded the alarm on the dangers of smoking, tobacco use continues to kill almost half a million Americans and causes up to \$333 billion in health care costs and lost productivity each year.

The *State of Tobacco Control 2015* report tracks yearly progress on key tobacco control policies at the federal and state levels, assigning grades based on whether laws are adequately protecting citizens from the enormous toll tobacco use takes on lives and the economy. This year’s report shows that while California earned a B for its smokefree air policies, the state received an F for its low tobacco taxes, an F for failing to sufficiently fund tobacco prevention and control programs, and a D for poor coverage of smoking cessation and treatment services.

The Lung Association and its partners continue to call for immediate action by all levels of government to achieve three bold goals: reduce smoking rates currently at about 18 percent to less than 10 percent by 2024; protect all Americans from secondhand smoke by 2019 and; ultimately eliminate the death and disease caused by tobacco use.

“The American Lung Association is urging states and the federal government to take needed steps to achieve these bold goals,” says Olivia J. Gertz, President and CEO, American Lung Association in California. “It’s no secret that to reduce tobacco use in the United States, our leaders need to muster the political will to implement proven policies. We cannot afford the health or financial consequences of their continued failure to act.”

In conjunction with the national report, the American Lung Association in California released its *State of Tobacco Control 2015 – California Local Grades* report, which issues grades for all 482 cities and 58 counties in California on local tobacco control policies. Grades are awarded in three categories: Smokefree Outdoor Air, Smokefree Housing, and Reducing Sales of Tobacco Products. Bonus points are provided in a new category called Emerging Issues. To view the complete California report, visit www.lung.org/california

The *California Local Grades* report found that numerous municipalities across the state have passed ordinances to protect their communities from the harmful effects of tobacco despite the lack of action at the state level. In 2014, a total of 40 cities and counties adopted new policies to protect residents and improve the health of their communities. In addition, the report shows that local policies prohibiting secondhand smoke in recreational settings now protect 80 percent of California’s total population, more cities and counties are taking steps to implement policies which incorporate electronic cigarettes, and several municipalities have taken steps to restrict pharmacies from selling tobacco products in their communities.



However, while many communities took significant action to improve their tobacco control policies, a total of 324 cities and counties throughout the state – 60 percent of all municipalities – did little to nothing and have received an F for their overall tobacco grade.

Most significantly, California’s weak position on tobacco prevention is due to the fact that the state has not increased its tobacco tax since 1999 and now ranks 33rd in the country at 87 cents per cigarette pack, far behind states like New York, Illinois, Texas, Florida, Oregon and Washington.

“Increasing the tobacco tax has been proven to reduce tobacco use,” says Gertz. “This is why the American Lung Association in California is standing with [Save Lives California](#), a broad coalition dedicated to passing a lifesaving \$2 per pack tobacco tax – either through the legislature or by ballot measure – by the end of 2016. By passing this measure, we will not only save the lives, we also will save California taxpayers billions in health care costs.”

Tobacco-related deaths are the single, most preventable cause of death in California. More than 21,300 kids start smoking each year in the state, and tobacco costs California \$18 billion – a tremendous burden that the state cannot afford.

[Save Lives California](#) will generate revenue to expand treatment services for Medi-Cal patients with tobacco-related and other illnesses, support existing statewide programs to prevent youth from using tobacco, stop illegal sales of tobacco, increase funding for medical research into new treatments and cures for deadly diseases such as cancer and lung disease, and restore California’s leadership in tobacco control efforts.

In 2014, the federal government took small steps to protect citizens from the harmful effects of tobacco, but still fell short in important areas such as tobacco taxes and finalizing its regulatory authority over all tobacco products. In April, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) [proposed](#) to assert authority over all tobacco products including e-cigarettes, little cigars and other tobacco products. [The American Lung Association also expressed strong opposition to](#) the Obama Administration’s proposal to exempt certain cigars from basic FDA oversight and that it failed to finalize the proposal by the end of 2014.

“We have a lot of work to do to improve California’s tobacco control efforts and protect public health from tobacco-related illnesses,” says Gertz. “I urge everyone to join the American Lung Association in California and Save Lives California and help us tell our leaders to take action now to save lives.”

This year’s report features new methodology to reflect the updated [2014 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) Best Practices for Comprehensive Tobacco Control Programs](#) as communities adopt stronger, more health-protective policies to improve public health and eliminate tobacco-caused death and disease. It incorporates also other tobacco product taxes and tobacco cessation coverage under Medicaid expansion into the grades. Due to updates in the methodology, all grades from the *State of Tobacco Control 2015* report cannot be directly compared to grades from *State of Tobacco Control 2014* or earlier reports.

About the American Lung Association in California

Now in its second century, the American Lung Association is the leading organization working to save lives by improving lung health and preventing lung disease. With your generous support, the American Lung Association is “Fighting For Air” through research, education and advocacy. For more information about the American Lung Association or to support the work it does, call 1-800-LUNG-USA (1-800-586-4872) or visit www.lung.org/california