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American Lung Association “State of Tobacco Control 2016” Report Finds California Failing in Efforts to Reduce Tobacco-Caused Death and Disease

Lung Association in California report grades all cities and counties on tobacco control policies; Save Lives California coalition urges \$2 tobacco tax to expand treatment services and existing programs for tobacco-related illnesses

(February 3, 2016, Los Angeles, CA) – Once a national leader in tobacco control efforts, California continues to fall behind other states in protecting its residents from the burden of tobacco according to the 14th annual American Lung Association *State of Tobacco Control 2016* report released today. Despite an historic opportunity in the California Legislature last year, state lawmakers failed yet again to enact tobacco control policies that would save lives and reduce the \$18 billion in annual health care costs due to smoking.

The *State of Tobacco Control 2016* 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. 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 an F for poor coverage of smoking cessation and treatment services.

“California must take stronger action to save lives and end the scourge of tobacco related death and disease,” said Olivia J. (Gertz) Diaz-Lapham, President and CEO, American Lung Association in California. “The single best way to do this is by increasing our low tobacco tax, which ranks 35th in the country. This will save lives and prevent our children from becoming the next generation hooked on tobacco.”

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.

In conjunction with the national report, the American Lung Association in California released its *State of Tobacco Control 2016 – 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 the Emerging Issues category. To view the complete California report, visit www.stateoftobaccocontrol.org/california2016.

Despite the lack of action at the state level, this year’s *California Local Grades* report finds that more than 80 California municipalities took steps to improve their grades – double the number from last year and the largest increase in adopted policies since the first publication of this report.



In addition, more than 200 communities have stepped up to regulate the sale and use of electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) as tobacco products. The report also shows that six California municipalities are leading the charge to adopt policies restricting sales of flavored tobacco products in response to mounting evidence regarding the likelihood of youth using candy or fruit-flavored tobacco products.

While many communities took significant action to improve their tobacco control policies, a total of 307 cities and counties throughout the state (40 percent of all municipalities) did little to nothing and have received an F for their overall tobacco grade.

Tobacco-related deaths are the single, most preventable cause of death in California. More than 16,000 kids start smoking each year in the state, and tobacco costs California \$18 billion – a tremendous burden that the state cannot afford.

“Nearly a quarter of high school students are using tobacco products, and use of e-cigarettes and little cigars is at an all-time high,” said David Tom Cooke, MD, FCCP, FACS, lung surgeon and member of the American Lung Association in California Governing Board. “It’s not a secret how we can reduce tobacco use. If California is going to make progress in reducing the number one cause of preventable death in the state, it’s clear that raising the tobacco tax and enacting strong tobacco control policies are necessary.”

The American Lung Association in California is part of [Save Lives California](#), a coalition of major health groups working to place a life-saving \$2 tobacco tax on the November 2016 ballot. The tax 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, 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.

California has not raised its tobacco tax since 1999 and now ranks 35th in the country at 87 cents per cigarette pack, far behind states like New York, Illinois, Texas, Florida, Oregon and Washington.

“California has a rare opportunity to directly save lives by supporting a tobacco tax to prevent and reduce tobacco use.” said Kristi VandenBosch, Governing Board Member, American Lung Association in California. “As our state remains well behind most others in the country in tobacco taxes, the Lung Association is proud to be a part of the Save Lives California effort. It’s time to take action to protect our kids from the deadly effects of tobacco products.”

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

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