

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## **NEW COALITION OF KENTUCKY HEALTH CARE ADVOCATES CALLS UPON GOVERNOR TO FUND MEDICAID QUIT SMOKING PROGRAM**

FRANKFORT, KY – A broad coalition of Kentucky health care advocates this week delivered a letter calling upon Kentucky Governor Steve Beshear to fully fund a Medicaid smoking cessation program created by the legislature in 2007, but never funded. Kentucky is one of only five states not to offer such a program.

Passed into law in 2007, HB 337 created a comprehensive smoking cessation program, including counseling and medications, for the 285,000 smokers on Kentucky Medicaid. Unfortunately, no funding was attached and the program has languished for two years as an unfunded mandate.

“We commend Governor Beshear’s leadership in increasing the tax on tobacco products this year, and ask that he continue the momentum toward a healthy Kentucky by funding the \$1.5 million needed to implement a smoking cessation benefit for the smokers in our Medicaid population,” said Sarah J. Wilding, President of the Kentucky Public Health Association.

Kentucky has the highest adult smoking rate – and highest smoking-related death rate – in the country. Yet, for approximately \$5 million (\$1.5 from Kentucky and \$3.5 in Federal matching funds), the Commonwealth could save thousands of lives and reduce our state’s Medicaid costs by millions per year.

“Since Kentucky Medicaid is already spending an estimated \$1.2 billion each year to treat Kentuckians suffering from smoking related illnesses, the investment of \$1.5 million will more than make up for itself by helping to decrease that figure by getting people off of cigarettes,” said Tonya Chang of the American Heart Association, on behalf of the coalition.

The coalition of 26 organizations, including the American Cancer Society, American Heart Association, American Lung Association, Kentucky Voices for Health, Kentucky Public Health Association and the Kentucky Medical Association, also plan to hold a rally in Frankfort on the morning of October 21.

A copy of the letter to Governor Beshear along with a list of the organizations who have signed in support is available below.

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September 29, 2009

The Honorable Steve Beshear,  
Governor  
Commonwealth of Kentucky  
700 Capitol Avenue, Suite 100  
Frankfort, Kentucky 40601

Dear Governor Beshear:

We commend you for your leadership in increasing the tax on tobacco products this year, and ask you to continue the momentum toward a healthy Kentucky by funding a smoking cessation benefit for the 285,000 smokers in our Medicaid population.

As you know, Kentucky is **one of only five states** that does not provide a comprehensive smoking cessation program for its Medicaid recipients. In comparison, Kentucky ranks as one of the top ten states for economic development and regularly touts its low energy costs. As Governor, you can change another important indicator for the Commonwealth by improving the health of our poorest and most vulnerable citizens through a comprehensive smoking cessation program including counseling and pharmacological treatments.

Kentucky has the highest adult smoking rate - and highest smoking-related death rate - in the country. Yet, for approximately \$5 million (\$1.5 from Kentucky and \$3.5 in Federal matching funds), the Commonwealth could save thousands of lives and reduce our state's Medicaid costs by millions per year.

It is time for Kentucky to take a stand to improve the poor smoking status that, according to the CDC, costs our Medicaid program an estimated \$500 million annually. According to the Cabinet for Health and Family Services Web site, "annually, Medicaid and Medicare costs exceed \$1.2 billion for treatment of Kentuckians suffering smoking-related diseases and conditions. This equals \$300 for each of the 4 million people living in Kentucky."

**We urge you to continue to make tobacco prevention and smoking cessation a funding priority by including a line-item in your 2010 budget for \$1.5 million to fully fund counseling and medications for Medicaid beneficiaries.**

As you recall, HB 337 passed in 2007 but has remained unfunded. During a July interview with Louisville's *WHAS11 News*, Secretary Janie Miller indicated that the Cabinet has not followed through because the General Assembly has not provided the funds to do so. This is unacceptable to the over 70% of the Medicaid beneficiaries across Kentucky who are interested in quitting and need the assistance of a comprehensive smoking cessation program.

**Please be the Governor who gives the 285,000 smokers on Medicaid who want to quit the support they need to live healthier and more productive lives.**

This program has already proven to be successful in the Commonwealth. Passport Health Plan currently provides smoking cessation benefits to its Medicaid recipients in the 16 counties surrounding the Louisville area. Since its inception in 2007, more than one thousand people have enrolled in Passport's cessation program and 51% have successfully quit smoking. Applying that percentage to the rest of Kentucky, Medicaid could save more than \$60 million.

***Why are we denying the rest of Kentucky's Medicaid population this same benefit?***

Smoking poses a significant health and economic threat to our state. We deserve to have a healthy Kentucky and this is one piece of the healthcare pie that can save money *and* lives. Offering comprehensive smoking cessation program to all of Kentucky's Medicaid population will not only improve the health of a vulnerable population but also help stem the rising costs of treating smoking-related illness and disease.

Your leadership is the only way to make this happen and make a significant difference for the Commonwealth. The undersigned organizations urge you to include funding in your 2010 Budget for a comprehensive smoking cessation program and help KY achieve a positive health rating among other states and proactively save Medicaid dollars.

Sincerely,

Advocacy Action Network

American Cancer Society

American Heart Association

American Lung Association in Kentucky

Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids

Catholic Conference of Kentucky

Child Advocacy Today: A Medical-Legal Partnership for Kentucky's Children

Covering Kentucky Kids and Families

Epilepsy Foundation of Kentuckiana

Kentucky Academy of Family Physicians

Kentucky Association of Nurse Anesthetists

Kentucky Coalition of Nurse Practitioners and Nurse Midwives

Kentucky Council of Churches

Kentucky Equal Justice Center

Kentucky Health Departments Association

Kentucky Medical Association

Kentucky Nurses Association

Kentucky Primary Care Association

Kentucky Public Health Association

Kentucky Rural Health Association

Kentucky Voices for Health

Kentucky Youth Advocates

Mental Health America of Kentucky

NAMI Kentucky

National Kidney Foundation of Kentucky

Purchase Area Health Education Center