



Written Statement
Joint Legislative Budget Hearing – Health
Thursday, February 25, 2021

Distinguished Members of the New York State Senate Finance and Assembly Ways and Means Committees:

As you continue your work on the Fiscal Year 2022 (FY 22) budget – amid a respiratory pandemic that has taken the lives of 45,000 New Yorkers, the prioritization of lung health is more critical than ever before. ***That is why the American Lung Association urge you to reject the Governor’s proposed cuts to the Children’s Asthma Program, Asthma Coalition Grants, and the Tobacco Control Program within the New York State Department of Health in the FY 22 budget. Additionally, we ask that you increase the tax on cigarettes by \$1.00 per pack to help New Yorkers quit smoking, prevent youth starting use of addictive of tobacco products, lower health care costs, and provide much needed revenue to the state.***

ASTHMA PROGRAMS AND COALITION GRANTS

An estimated 1.5 million adults and over 400,000 children in New York live with Asthma; a chronic disease of the lungs that causes wheezing, breathlessness, chest tightness, and coughing. If not well-controlled, even under normal circumstances, asthma can greatly limit a person's quality of life. In addition, the people of New York continue to face threats from air pollution, tobacco use and barriers to quality, affordable health insurance. Since nearly 1 in 10 New Yorkers have asthma, and according to the CDC, our rates remain higher than the national average; it is critical to continue the work of the NYS funded projects.

To date, funding for the state’s Asthma Program has provided the asthma coalitions across New York State with vital resources needed to educate and train thousands of healthcare professionals, patients, community stakeholders and students. These educational initiatives have helped countless patients and their families manage this chronic disease. Additionally, support for home-based asthma services has been provided to patients across the state by nurses and community health workers.

The state’s Asthma Program is already underfunded, and a twenty percent cut would have drastic impacts for the health of New Yorkers living with asthma.

TOBACCO CONTROL PROGRAM

Smoking takes an enormous toll on New Yorkers. Nearly 23,000 deaths each year in New York are directly related to smoking. Statewide, 12.7% of adults still smoke and 4.8% of high school students smoke. In addition, disparities remain with smoking rates much higher for adults reporting mental distress (27.7%), Medicaid recipients (23.5%) & young cancer survivors aged 18-44 (32%).

The Tobacco Control Program (TCP), administered by the New York State Department of Health Bureau of Tobacco Control (BTC) uses an evidence based, policy-driven, and population-level approach to decrease tobacco initiation by youth, increase quitting among adult smokers, and eliminate exposure to secondhand smoke in New York. Their work takes a multi-pronged approach to address tobacco use in New York by promoting policy change through evidence-based strategies that alter social norms and make tobacco less desirable, less acceptable, and less accessible; promoting the delivery of evidence-based tobacco dependence treatment via broad health systems interventions focusing on the existing health care infrastructure, and; implementing hard-hitting, emotionally evocative media campaigns that support policy change and promote increased quit attempts via evidence-based methods.

The FY 22 Executive Budget proposes to cut funding of the TCP by over \$7 million (to \$32.7 million). This is down from a nearly \$85 million budget just over a decade ago and meager percentage of the Centers for Disease Control Best Practices State Spending Recommendation of \$203 million. The public health professionals within the TCP need the resources necessary to match their efforts to decrease and ultimately eliminate tobacco uses among all New Yorkers.

TOBACCO TAX

One way to generate revenue to support TCP efforts would be to increase the NYS cigarette tax by \$1.00 per pack.

New York has not raised the tax on cigarettes and most tobacco products in over a decade. An increase in the tobacco tax would be win-win-win scenario. New Yorkers would see:

- Improved health – an estimated 22,000 youth under the age of 18 would be kept from becoming adult smokers and another 54,000 current adult smokers would quit.
- Lowered health costs – the 5-year Medicaid program savings for the state would be an estimated \$61.9 million and another \$10.81 million from fewer smoking caused lung cancer cases.
- Additional revenue - a tax on cigarettes alone would bring an estimated \$38.87 million in new annual state revenue.

We are aware that as lawmakers you are rarely faced with an easy decision. This holds particularly true during something as unforeseen and drastic as the pandemic. However, as public officials, you also know the impact smart decision making has on the lives of your constituents. There are many sources of revenue for the state of New York and any budget shortfall should not be resolved on the backs of New Yorkers living with a chronic condition like asthma, lung cancer, COPD or an addiction due to tobacco use.

If you would like more information or have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me at trevor.summerfield@lung.org.

Sincerely,

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American Lung Association