

Oklahoma's Success in Reducing the Toll of Tobacco

Governor Mary Fallin

As Governor of the State of Oklahoma, my goal is to create and maintain a happy, healthy, and productive state, but we cannot expect to improve the health of Oklahomans without addressing our state's number one killer: tobacco. In fact, both of my parents died from smoking-related illnesses. After years of smoking, my father died from heart disease when he was younger than I am today. My mother smoked her whole life. At the age of 73 she had heart surgery, suffered a stroke, and was bedridden for five years before passing away. Although each death is tragic, for every person who dies from smoking another 30 are suffering from a smoking-related illness.¹ As I have learned through personal experience, the results of tobacco use place an unnecessary strain on family well-being, our state, and our economy. Indeed, smoking costs Oklahomans more than \$2 billion in healthcare costs and lost workforce productivity annually.²

Oklahoma's 2012 adult smoking prevalence was 23.3%, compared to 19.6% nationally.³ Although these figures alarm and sadden me, I am encouraged by the progress realized in our state. Between 2001 and 2010, the State of Oklahoma has seen a statistically significant decline in adult smoking prevalence.⁴ Annual sales of cigarettes are also down dramatically, with more than 100 million fewer packs sold than a decade ago.⁵

I am very proud to have contributed to the ongoing efforts to reduce tobacco use throughout my tenure in public office. As Governor, I issued an executive order in 2012 that prohibited the use of any tobacco product on all properties owned, leased, or contracted for use by the State of Oklahoma.⁶ This includes state parks, where families can now enjoy the beauty of Oklahoma's landscape without exposure to tobacco products or their waste. During implementation of this policy, I also closed the State Capitol's smoking room and created a Capitol Fitness Center in its place. In 2013, I proactively

expanded the prohibition to include the use of electronic cigarettes and vaping devices.⁷

Oklahoma tobacco-free efforts remain focused and diligent in providing services and programs that are guided by evidence-based, effective strategies. I am proud that we are contributing to the body of science. State employees now receive a reduction of their health insurance premiums for attesting to not using tobacco products. The Oklahoma Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust (TSET) provides a robust tobacco quitline for Oklahomans with free quit-coaching and nicotine replacement products.

According to the most recent research, smoking is known to harm almost all organs. In fact, new evidence links smoking to diabetes, liver cancer, colorectal cancer, and ectopic pregnancy, among other conditions. Even secondhand smoke exposure is known to cause lung cancer, heart disease, and strokes in non-smokers.¹ Unfortunately, these grave health consequences do not deter the tobacco industry from spending more than \$160 million annually to market products throughout Oklahoma, often targeting youth.^{2,8} To help combat their efforts, we have enlisted the support of Oklahoma communities and they have rallied.

In 2010, the Legislature adopted the "Oklahoma Certified Healthy Communities Act," establishing a voluntary certification program for communities that promote wellness through the implementation of policy and programs, encourage the adoption of healthy behaviors, and establish safe and supportive environments.⁹ This unique program recognizes Oklahoma communities for their outstanding efforts and achievements in actively creating a healthier place for their residents to live. Communities recognized for excellence are those that prohibit use of tobacco products on municipal property. In Oklahoma, we are making the healthy choice the easy choice, and that includes the option to breathe smoke-free air.

Even with a heavy emphasis on reducing tobacco use and significant progress in that area, we still have a long way to go. Too many of our young people are becoming addicted. Too many smokers have not yet managed to quit. Too many Oklahomans are still breathing secondhand smoke in workplaces and public places. Because of these facts, I will continue the fight against tobacco and

From the Office of the Governor, State of Oklahoma, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Address correspondence to: Mary Fallin, Governor of Oklahoma, Oklahoma State Capitol, 2300 N. Lincoln Blvd., Room 212, Oklahoma City OK 73105. E-mail: alex.weintz@gov.ok.gov. (Governor's Communications Director).

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work for our state's health and wellness by creating opportunities to help people make healthier choices and reducing exposure to secondhand smoke. To that end, I have committed to lead a future statewide petition drive for a ballot initiative that will provide additional smoke-free public places for our citizens. I am confident that the people of Oklahoma will join me at the polls and express their right to be smoke free in public areas.

More than 50 years have passed since the Surgeon General released the first report on Smoking and Health,¹⁰ yet an estimated 7,500 Oklahomans continue to die annually from tobacco-related causes. Tobacco is hurting Oklahoma's families, our economy, and compromising our state's status as a business leader and pioneer. Because this health issue is so critical to our state, I am proud to introduce *Best Practices, Research, and Relationships—Oklahoma's Investment in Tobacco Control*, showcasing many of the unique contributions the State of Oklahoma is making to the science of tobacco use prevention. I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the Oklahoma Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust and Oklahoma Tobacco Research Center for coordinating efforts with the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* to make this important publication possible. This supplement discusses many of the innovative programs, policies, and research that, collectively, are now serving to put Oklahoma on the cutting edge when it comes to fighting back against the deadly influences of tobacco.

My sincerest hope is that in the coming years our efforts will have been successful and our current generation will not be victims of the personal loss that I have felt because of tobacco.

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