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## Tobacco-Free Oklahoma Week Highlights How All Oklahomans Pay the Price for Tobacco Use

**Oklahoma City** – Oklahoma Governor Mary Fallin has proclaimed Jan. 29 through Feb. 4 as Tobacco-Free Oklahoma Week – a week highlighting the price all Oklahomans pay for tobacco use, whether they smoke or not.

Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death in Oklahoma. It costs more than 6,000 Oklahomans their lives each year and causes untold heartbreak to thousands more family members. But the cost of tobacco use doesn't stop with the loss of life and grief. The financial burden from tobacco use falls on every Oklahoma business and citizen.

### **Costs of Tobacco Use**

On average, Oklahoma businesses lose \$4,400 each year for every employee that smokes. This economic loss is due to increased sick days and disability, higher medical and insurance costs, and shorter, less productive work-lives.

Oklahoma's annual health care costs directly caused by smoking are \$1.16 billion, including \$218 million in Medicaid costs.

Every Oklahoma household on average pays \$548 each year in state and federal taxes related to smoking costs, whether anyone in the household smokes or not.

"Reducing tobacco use and making a commitment to a healthier workforce must be a top priority for all Oklahomans if we are serious about continued economic growth for the state," said Tracey Strader, executive director of the Oklahoma Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust (TSET). "Existing and prospective employers closely examine health care costs when considering expansion and relocation. A healthy workforce can only sharpen our competitive edge and further economic development for the state."

### **Steps to Reduce Costs**

Businesses can take actions to improve the health of their employees. Simple steps, such as making business properties tobacco-free, and offering health insurance that covers tobacco cessation can improve the bottom line. More and more businesses are also participating in the Oklahoma Certified Healthy Business program sponsored by The Academy for State Goals, the Oklahoma Turning Point Council, The State Chamber of

Commerce and the Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH). This year more than 75 businesses qualified with an excellence rating, supporting tobacco-free worksites.

“We know, and other states have demonstrated, that tobacco use can be reduced through effective policies and programs at local and state levels,” said State Health Commissioner Dr. Terry Cline. “However, until the laws put in place in Oklahoma in the 1980s and 90s due to tobacco industry influence are repealed, and local rights are returned to communities, Oklahoma’s cities and towns will continue to be prohibited from passing local tobacco prevention ordinances that protect their citizens and help create a healthier workforce.”

Good news for Oklahoma is that serious quit attempts in the state are at an all time high. While many successfully quit on their own, receive services through health insurance or by talking to their doctor, others have contacted the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline at 1-800-QUIT-NOW or online at [OKhelpline.com](http://OKhelpline.com) for free coaching on quitting. The Helpline is a free program funded by TSET, OSDH and the CDC which provides free quit coaching by phone or online and offers a free two-week starter kit of nicotine patches, gum or lozenges.

“Not only is tobacco use taking a personal toll in increasing preventable disease and early death among Oklahomans, its associated costs are killing the economic growth of our communities and our state,” added Cline. “From individuals, to communities, to our businesses, each of us has a role to play to prevent and reduce the use of tobacco. Ultimately, this will improve the lives and livelihoods of all Oklahomans.”

In honor of Tobacco-Free Oklahoma Week, Oklahomans can share their stories about how tobacco has impacted their lives for the chance to win four tickets to the Oklahoma City Thunder home game on Feb. 3 versus Memphis. Go to [Thunder.nba.com](http://Thunder.nba.com) to share your story by 3 p.m. on Wednesday, Feb. 1.

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Sidebar:

## **Resources**

Business Support:

Make it Your Business – a free program designed to enhance the health of your employees. Contact your local Communities of Excellence in Tobacco Control program at: [www.StopsWithMe.com](http://www.StopsWithMe.com) on the Community Organizations page or find more information at: [www.strongandhealthy.ok.gov](http://www.strongandhealthy.ok.gov).

Certified Healthy Businesses / Certified Healthy Restaurants Programs at: [www.okturningpoint.org](http://www.okturningpoint.org).

Quitting Tobacco Use Support:

**Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline (1-800-QUIT-NOW or OKhelpline.com) –**

Oklahomans receive free quit coaching by telephone or online and receive a free two-week starter kit of nicotine patches or gum. Funded by the Oklahoma Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust, Oklahoma State Department of Health and the US CDC.

**Smokefree.gov, Women.Smokefree.gov and Teen.Smokefree.gov** – free online quit smoking programs that have access to “Live Help” online through text messaging with a National Cancer Institute smoking cessation counselor.