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Oklahoma Youth Smoking Rates Drop

Combination of Prevention Programs and Policies Credited for Positive Trend

Oklahoma health officials announced today that youth smoking rates in Oklahoma dropped in 2009, reducing the number of Oklahoma children who will suffer from a lifetime of addiction, disease and early death.

According to the bi-annual 2009 Oklahoma Youth Tobacco Survey, 20.2 percent of Oklahoma high school students were current cigarette smokers, down from 23.4 percent in 2007. The 2009 survey also found that 6.5 percent of Oklahoma middle school students were current cigarette smokers, down from 7.5 percent in 2007.

In total, there are an estimated 10,000 fewer Oklahoma youth smoking now than two years ago. This represents a decrease of about 3,300 Oklahoma youth who would have died early as a result of smoking. One out of three smokers die prematurely from a smoking-caused disease.

“This is impressive progress but we know there’s still a long way to go,” said State Health Commissioner Terry Cline. “All Oklahomans can play a role in preventing youth smoking. For example, we know that when more parents and other adults quit smoking, fewer children start.”

Other findings from the 2009 survey included an increase in the proportion of Oklahoma children considered to be “committed non-smokers.” These are youth who have never smoked and report that they would definitely not smoke a cigarette during the next year, even if their best friend offered them one.

Among Oklahoma high school students, the number of “committed non-smokers” increased to 40.3 percent in 2009, up from 36.6 percent in 2007. Among Oklahoma middle school students, the number of “committed non-smokers” increased to 64.1 percent in 2009, up from 59 percent in 2007.

In total, there are an estimated 25,000 more “committed non-smokers” among Oklahoma youth than in 2007.

“The combination of effective tobacco prevention programs and policies is making a difference,” said Tracey Strader, executive director of the Oklahoma Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust. “Sadly, too many of Oklahoma’s kids remain vulnerable to the aggressive marketing practices of

the tobacco industry. We must all continue to take action to protect our youth from a lifetime of addiction, disease and early death.”

The tobacco industry currently spends an estimated \$213 million each year to promote smoking in Oklahoma. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that Oklahoma spend a minimum of \$32.2 million each year on a comprehensive evidence-based tobacco prevention program. Earnings from the Oklahoma Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust (TSET) have gradually increased from \$650,000 in 2002 to \$18 million in 2009. To date, almost all of the endowment’s earnings have been used for tobacco prevention.

“Oklahoma voters made a wise decision in 2000 by creating an endowment that allows earnings to grow over time,” said Casey Killblane, Chair of the TSET Board of Directors. “We can all be proud that Oklahoma is keeping the promise of the Master Settlement Agreement. Because of the endowment, resources will be dedicated to improve the health of Oklahomans for generations to come.”

Smoking is Oklahoma’s leading preventable cause of death, killing more Oklahomans than alcohol, auto accidents, AIDS, suicides, murders, and illegal drugs combined. Smoking costs Oklahoma more than \$2.7 billion in medical expenses and lost productivity each year – or an average of \$750 per Oklahoman.

The Oklahoma Youth Tobacco Survey (OYTS) is a representative survey of all middle school and high school students in Oklahoma. The OYTS was conducted in the spring of 2009 by the OSDH, in cooperation with the CDC, the Oklahoma State Department of Education, and numerous partners from local health agencies and local school districts.

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