



STATE OF OKLAHOMA

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Tobacco Endowment Awards Grants to Reduce Tobacco Use in Oklahoma

OKLAHOMA CITY – The Board of Directors of the Oklahoma Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust today announced the award of nearly \$1.5 million in grants to 20 local coalitions to reduce tobacco use in Oklahoma.

“The *Communities of Excellence* grants program challenges local coalitions to build on their experience in tobacco control and other health issues to develop comprehensive programs that reduce tobacco use throughout the community,” said Susan Bizé, Chair of the Board of Directors.

Funded entirely with investment earnings from the tobacco settlement endowment, each coalition will receive an average of \$75,000 in the first year of the five-year grant program.

“These grants are an important expansion of the services funded by the Tobacco Settlement,” State Treasurer Robert Butkin, Chair of the endowment’s Board of Investors said. “The money earned on our investment of the settlement funds is being put to efficient use to help those who are addicted quit and to help prevent Oklahoma youth from starting.”

Total funding for the five-year initiative will depend on investment earnings in the years to come, but is expected to top \$14 million.

Attorney General Drew Edmondson, one of the eight attorneys general responsible for negotiating the historic 1998 tobacco settlement between the states and big tobacco said, “Coalitions across the state are fighting this important public health battle in the heart of Oklahoma’s communities. These are the people in the trenches day in and day out. They have an intimate knowledge of the tobacco problem in their area and often develop personal relationships with the people they serve. These grants will allow community-specific solutions to enhance other statewide anti-tobacco campaigns.”

(more)

The goals of the *Communities of Excellence* program are to make public places and workplaces smoke free; have community organizations and events reject tobacco industry sponsorship; have schools adopt tobacco-free policies and implement strong anti-tobacco curriculum; have health care providers routinely refer tobacco-users to accessible, culturally appropriate cessation services; have businesses and insurance companies provide insurance coverage for tobacco dependence treatment and run tobacco prevention messages in their newsletters; have tobacco industry promotions and activities monitored and countered; and have police enforce tobacco-related local ordinances.

“At the heart of each of these community grants is a coalition composed of organizations that are dedicated to improving the health of their communities. While the funded coalitions will be following a strategic planning model that has proven to be effective in other states, there is no one-size-fits-all program that can adequately meet the diverse needs of Oklahoma’s communities,” said Tracey Strader, executive director. “The coalitions understand that, and each will use the model to create a strategic plan that addresses the unique needs of their communities.”

The *Communities of Excellence* program is consistent with the Board of Directors’ strategic plan that prioritizes funding for programs to reduce Oklahoma’s devastating tobacco use problem, and is recommended by the Oklahoma Tobacco Use Prevention and Cessation Advisory Committee and State Plan.

The Tobacco Use Prevention Service of the Oklahoma State Department of Health provides technical assistance for the program, and the University of Oklahoma College Of Public Health, through the Comprehensive Cancer Center, provides the program’s independent evaluation.

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