



STATE OF OKLAHOMA

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Tobacco Endowment Continues Focus on Oklahoma's Leading Cause of Preventable Death

Oklahoma Tobacco Research Center Latest Addition to Comprehensive Program

TULSA – The Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust (TSET) today announced the award of a grant to establish the Oklahoma Tobacco Research Center (OTRC) as the latest addition to the board's comprehensive program to reduce tobacco use. The announcement of the award of \$4 million over a five-year period was made Friday at a meeting of the TSET Board of Directors in Tulsa.

"The Oklahoma Tobacco Research Center will serve a key role in translating research to practice to help ensure that programs funded to fight tobacco addiction in Oklahoma remain among the most effective in the country," said Tracey Strader, executive director of the Oklahoma Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust. The OTRC will be established within the University of Oklahoma Cancer Institute, which is on track to receive formal recognition by the National Cancer Institute as a Comprehensive Cancer Center.

"Because over 30 percent of all cancer deaths in the U.S. are tobacco-related, preventing tobacco use is the single greatest factor in reducing cancer incidence and mortality," said Ken Rowe, chair of the board of directors. "The tobacco problem was at the heart of the 1998 Master Settlement Agreement, and reducing tobacco use is the highest priority of the Board."

Development of the Oklahoma Tobacco Research Center is consistent with the Board of Directors' strategic plan that prioritizes funding for programs to reduce the state's devastating tobacco use problem. The Center will be a statewide collaborative, providing seed grants and bringing together researchers from various institutions through the state to coordinate these important research activities. The OTRC will also help to fulfill the high standards of program evaluation called for by the Oklahoma State Plan for Tobacco Use Prevention and Cessation.

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“The Oklahoma Tobacco Research Center is the latest addition to our ongoing efforts to reduce tobacco use – our state’s leading cause of preventable death,” said Susan Bizé, chair of the board’s program committee. “Each element of the comprehensive program is essential to long-term success.” Programs funded by TSET include the following:

- The *Communities of Excellence* grants help support 16 local coalitions serving 25 counties and three tribal nations in Oklahoma. These local partners are currently in their second year of implementing their own comprehensive strategic plans to fight tobacco use in their communities. Because community partnerships are so essential to success, a second wave of competitive grants has recently been announced to help support the efforts of up to ten additional local coalitions in other counties and tribal nations throughout the state.
- The *Addressing Tobacco in Specific Populations* grants help support initiatives targeting tobacco use within four specific populations at high risk for tobacco use and tobacco-related disease. These grantees are currently in the process of developing four-year strategic plans to be implemented starting later this year.
- The *Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline* (1-800-QUIT-NOW) provides callers with up to five free telephone-based coaching sessions with professional Quit Coaches throughout their quitting process. Participants in the multiple-call program may also receive free nicotine patches, or gum, or they may be referred to their health insurance plan or health care professional for additional treatment. To date, the Helpline has provided the free services to over 40,000 Oklahomans.
- Proven in other states to be highly effective in the overall strategy to reduce tobacco use, *Public Education Media Campaigns* are used to promote the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline, to help prevent youth from starting to use tobacco, and to educate the public about the dangers of secondhand smoke and other issues.

“Although we’ve finally been able to start a meaningful effort in Oklahoma, we still have a long way to go to counteract the billions spent each year by the tobacco industry to promote its deadly products. Oklahoma’s wise decision to create a secure and growing endowment already stands as a model for the rest of the nation,” Strader said.

Funding for the programs comes primarily from investment income from the endowment. Voters approved by a two-to-one margin in November 2000 a constitutional amendment to permanently set aside a portion of Oklahoma’s share of the tobacco settlement. Each year, 75 percent of Oklahoma’s share of the settlement is placed in the endowment for investment. The balance of the settlement payments is appropriated by the Legislature for health and human services purposes. Eventually, the annual investment income from the endowment will become larger than the total yearly settlement payment received from the tobacco industry.

In Oklahoma, more than 600,000 people, or about 25 percent of adults, smoke. Three out of four want to quit and over half try to quit in any given year. Each year, an estimated 5,700 Oklahomans die as a direct result of their addiction. Some 14 percent of all Medicaid spending is related to smoking – estimated at \$170 million annually in Oklahoma. Total economic costs of smoking exceed \$2.2 billion annually, or about \$600 per Oklahoman per year.

For more information on the Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust please see: www.tset.ok.gov.

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