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OSDH Acknowledges Cigarette Tax Increase

The Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) today commended Governor Fallin and the legislature for approving the additional \$1 tax on cigarettes.

Public health officials predict the tax increase will reduce the percentage of youth under the age of 18 who smoke and ultimately become adult smokers, and encourage as many as 18,000 current smokers to quit. Fewer smokers mean a decrease in premature smoking-related deaths and a long-term health care cost savings of more than \$767 million.

Stephanie U'ren is the director of the OSDH Center for the Advancement of Wellness where efforts are made to reduce tobacco use in Oklahoma by working with communities, schools and workplaces to enact policy and social norm changes.

"This is an important step in the right direction which will save thousands of lives," said U'ren. "This policy change will motivate thousands of current tobacco users to quit and prevent an even larger number of our children from starting this deadly habit."

The tax increase will provide a savings of \$3.46 million over five years for Medicaid and \$6.88 million in health care cost savings from fewer smoking-related heart attacks and strokes.

Approximately 7,500 Oklahomans die each year from tobacco-related causes. Increasing the price of tobacco products is a proven strategy approved by the Surgeon General to reduce the use of tobacco. U'ren said smoking cessation will continue to be a priority of the Oklahoma Health Improvement Plan.

The OSDH offers training and technical assistance to clinicians, municipalities, schools and businesses which provides guidance in adopting effective policies and cessation services. For more information contact the Comanche County Health Department at (580) 248-5890 or visit www.health.ok.gov.

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