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74% of North Carolina Voters Support Funding Tobacco Prevention Programs

*Future Funding for Tobacco Prevention at Risk
Due to Elimination of Health and Wellness Trust Fund*

RALEIGH (February 22, 2012) – A new statewide survey released today shows that North Carolina voters overwhelmingly support continuing to use tobacco settlement revenue for programs to prevent kids from starting to smoke and help smokers quit.

Three out of four North Carolina voters (74 percent) believe the state should continue to dedicate at least \$17 million of the money it receives from the tobacco settlement to fund the state's tobacco prevention and control program. Support for funding the program comes from a broad-based coalition of voters, including strong majorities of Republicans (69 percent), independents (77 percent) and Democrats (78 percent). Just 20 percent of voters oppose continued funding for tobacco prevention programs.

“We can spend a little now or a lot later,” said Pam Seamans, Executive Director of the NC Alliance for Health. “Tobacco prevention is one of the smartest and most fiscally responsible investments we can make, even in difficult budget times. If we continue to invest in tobacco prevention now, we will not only reduce smoking and save lives, but also save more money than we spend by reducing smoking-caused health care costs”

The poll of 500 North Carolina voters was funded by the North Carolina Alliance for Health, the American Cancer Society, the American Heart Association, the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

The poll also found:

- 80 percent of North Carolina voters said that it was important for the state to use a portion of the tobacco settlement money to fund tobacco prevention.
- Even after poll respondents were reminded of the state's budget problems, by nearly a two-to-one margin (60 percent to 35 percent) voters agreed with the need to use tobacco settlement revenues to fund tobacco prevention rather than using the funds to pay for other programs or help balance the budget.
- By more than a three-to-one margin, voters say that they are more likely to vote for a candidate who supports funding tobacco prevention programs (59 percent more likely to 17 percent less likely).

“North Carolina collects more than \$145 million a year in revenue from the tobacco settlement. It takes just a fraction of this revenue to fund tobacco prevention at the current level (\$17.3 million per year),”

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said Christine Weason, North Carolina Government Relations Director with the American Cancer Society.

“It is only right to use funds derived from tobacco to support programs that we know work to protect our kids from tobacco. The state collects \$145 million per year in tobacco settlement money – surely a part of this should be used to reduce tobacco-caused disease and death,” said Betsy Vetter, Director of Government Relations for the American Heart Association and Chair of the NC Alliance for Health.

North Carolina ranks 21st in the nation in funding programs to prevent kids from smoking and help smokers quit, spending just 16.2 percent of the \$106.8 million recommended by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), according to a recent report by leading public health organizations. Future funding for tobacco prevention is at risk since the state abolished the Health and Wellness Trust Fund (HWTF) in 2011. The Fund previously received 25 percent of the state’s tobacco settlement funds and provided dedicated funding for the state’s tobacco prevention and cessation program. The program faces elimination unless funding is renewed this year.

Despite progress made in reducing smoking, tobacco remains the leading preventable cause of death in North Carolina, claiming about 12,200 lives each year and costing \$2.5 billion annually in health care bills. Smoking-caused government expenditures amount to a hidden tax of more than \$560 per North Carolina household. Currently, 16.7 percent of North Carolina high school students smoke, and 11,100 additional kids become regular smokers every year.

For more information on the poll results, please visit www.ncallianceforhealth.org .

The survey of a random sample of 500 likely 2012 general election voters in North Carolina was conducted by Public Opinion Strategies. The survey was conducted by landline telephone January 7-9, 2012. Voters were screened for likely participation in the November 2012 general election. To assure that the data are representative of the population, the results were checked against expected November 2012 turnout and weighted by key demographics when necessary based on POS’s projection of a likely November 2012 turnout. Overall results have a margin of error of +/- 4.38 percentage points.

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