

Alliance for a Healthy New England

HEALTH NOW! MASSACHUSETTS

BENEFITS OF *HEALTH NOW!* TO LOW INCOME COMMUNITIES

More Money Into Our Low-Income Communities

- The Health Now! bill takes the tax raised from tobacco users and spends all of the revenue on programs in low income communities. And because of this focus, the federal government's Medicaid program will also double the money we raise for these programs. As a result, far more money will flow into low-income communities in the form of new benefits than will come out in the form of tobacco taxes.

Increased Access To Health Care to 85,000 people

- The Health Now! bill will expand health care access to 85,000 low income individuals in Massachusetts; over ½ of the remaining low income uninsured. Lower-income and minority groups are two to three times more likely to be uninsured. Uninsured people are more than three times as likely to have gone without a needed doctor's visit, not been able to fill a prescription, or not been able to get recommended medical tests or treatment. Due to lack of health care, people also delay necessary care, which can lead to missed diagnoses, untreated conditions, poor health, and death.

Lowering Smoking Rates – Saving Lives

- The Health Now! bill will reduce smoking rates and increase availability and access to tobacco treatment programs. Lower-income individuals are more sensitive to large tobacco price increases. A tobacco tax increase will result in decreased tobacco consumption and tobacco-related illnesses, particularly among these groups. However, for those that are addicted and need more help in quitting, the Health Now! initiative ensures that tobacco treatment programs and information are provided by Massachusetts' public health programs, including Medicaid, MassHealth, and the Children's and Adult Medical Security Plans.
- Today the tobacco industry targets youth, minorities and low-income individuals with advertising campaigns to promote tobacco use. As a result, these groups have significantly higher smoking rates than many other groups and suffer disproportionately from smoking-related diseases. Unlike the slow gradual price increases totaling \$1.00 the tobacco companies have imposed in the last two and a half years to increase their profits, a large tobacco tax increase effectively "unmarkets" tobacco products to the industry's target groups because these vulnerable smokers are most sensitive to sudden large tobacco price increases. They are two to three times more likely to quit or reduce consumption due to a large price increase.

Eliminating Disparities in Access to Health Care

- The Health Now! bill will support an expanded role for community health workers. Community health workers work primarily in low income, minority and immigrant communities where the rate of uninsurance is highest and where people rely most heavily on emergency care. We know from the success of these workers already that they are essential to bringing important health information to the communities that need it most and connecting them with health care they need. The community health worker program will also help address the wide disparities in health status among racial and ethnic minorities in Massachusetts.

A tobacco tax increase will reduce the number of Massachusetts residents who smoke, and reduce the substantial cost - \$2.4 billion - of smoking to the state's economy. In addition to saving lives, a tobacco tax increase will save the state economy millions of dollars in direct and indirect costs associated with smoking.

[Last updated 3/13/01]