

# Alliance for a Healthy New England

## HEALTH NOW! MASSACHUSETTS

### QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT *HEALTH NOW!* MASSACHUSETTS

#### **What is *Health Now!*?**

*Health Now!* is a bill, sponsored by Rep. Rachel Kaprielian and Rep. John Rogers in the House ( HB. 2169) and Sen. Mark Montigny, Sen. Linda Melconian, and Sen. Richard Moore in the Senate (SB. 1703), to improve the health of the people in the Commonwealth by:

- Expanding health insurance coverage
- Investing in public health
- Strengthening the health care safety net

#### **How is *Health Now!* funded?**

*Health Now!* is funded primarily by a \$.50 increase in cigarette taxes and a similar increase in other tobacco products along with federal matching funds. A small amount of revenue is generated by premiums and by tobacco settlement funds. *Health Now!* also authorizes federal matching funds that are generated by the Uncompensated Care Pool to be used to support access programs.

#### **How does *Health Now!* expand coverage?**

*Health Now!* targets low wage workers who do not have access to employer based coverage. These workers are disproportionately people of color. African Americans are twice as likely to be uninsured and Latinos three times as likely as white workers. Coverage will be aimed at older adolescents, parents whose children are now covered but who themselves remain uninsured and other low wage workers. *Health Now!* will expand coverage to over 85,000 low income individuals in the Commonwealth; over ½ of the remaining low income uninsured.

#### **Other than low wage-workers, who else benefits from *Health Now!* ?**

*Health Now!* will offer additional benefits to low income Medicare beneficiaries who are enrolled in the prescription drug program. These benefits will be available at no additional cost to the state. At the same time, new federal matching funds will reduce the cost to the Commonwealth of the prescription program. *Health Now!* will also allow people with disabilities to maintain their coverage when they turn 65. Finally, a portion of the revenue raised by the new tobacco tax will be used to support the existing programs for children, parents, seniors, people with disabilities, and the long-term unemployed.

#### **How does *Health Now!* improve public health?**

Raising tobacco taxes will reduce smoking related deaths by over 8,000 and reduce youth smoking by 8.5%. *Health Now!* will also make smoking cessation treatment more available.

*Health Now!* also will support an expanded role for community health workers, particularly in low income, minority, and immigrant communities where the rate of uninsurance is highest and where people rely most heavily on emergency care. These workers will bring important health information to the communities that need it most and connect them with the health care they need.

### **How does *Health Now!* stabilize the health care safety net?**

*Health Now!* authorizes the transfer of federal matching funds generated by disproportionate share payments to hospitals to the Commonwealth's other access programs, thereby eliminating the need for and use of pool funds for this purpose. Also, by covering more low income uninsured, fewer people will need to rely on the pool to cover their hospitalizations.

### **Who supports *Health Now!***

A broad and growing coalition of consumer, provider and insurers including: *Allston-Brighton Health Boston Coalition; American Academy of Pediatrics Massachusetts Chapter; American Cancer Society; American College of Cardiology, Massachusetts Chapter; American Heart Association; American Lung Association of Greater Norfolk County; Asian American Advisory Board; Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, New England Chapter; Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts; Boston Public Health Commission; Boston Women's Health Book Collective; Center for Health Care; Coalition for Social Justice; Community Action Committee of Cape Cod and Islands, Inc.; Dana-Farber Cancer Institute; District 7 (Boston) Roundtable Health Committee; Easter Seals; Fallon Community Health Plan; Hallmark Health; Harvard Pilgrim Health Care; Health Care For All; Jamaica Plain Asthma Environmental Initiative; Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Boston; Joint Committee for Children's Health Care in Everett; Latin American Public Health Council; Latino Health Institute; Latino Health Policy Council; Lower/Outer Cape Community Coalition; Lynn Health Task Force; March of Dimes, Massachusetts Chapter; Massachusetts Association of Community Health; Massachusetts Association of Practicing Urologists; Massachusetts Association of Public Health Nurses; Massachusetts College of Emergency Physicians; Massachusetts Community Health Worker Network; Massachusetts Health Council; Massachusetts Health Officers Association; Massachusetts Hospital Association; Massachusetts Law Reform Institute; Massachusetts Medical Society; Massachusetts Nurses Association; Massachusetts Public Health Association; Massachusetts Senior Action Council; Massachusetts Society of Clinical Oncologists; Massachusetts Society of Otolaryngology/Head and Neck Surgery; Massachusetts Teachers Association; MASSPIRG; Neighbor to Neighbor; Neponset Valley Health Care Coalition; New American-Russian Speaking Association; New England Aftercare Ministries, Inc.; North Quabbin Community Coalition; Partners Health Care; Service Employees International Union, Local 285; Spanish American Union; Tobacco Control Resource Center; Tufts Health Plan; Tufts University School of Medicine; Union Hospital (As of 4/13/01)*

The Health Now! Massachusetts campaign is part of the Alliance for a Healthy New England, a region wide effort to increase tobacco taxes and use the proceeds to expand health coverage and promote public health.

### **Prepared by Health Now! Massachusetts**

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