

# **Alliance** for a Healthy New England

## **HEALTH NOW! MASSACHUSETTS**

### **“An Act Expanding Access to Health Care, Reducing Youth Smoking and the Use of Tobacco Products, and Improving the Public Health in the Commonwealth”**

#### **Health Now! Massachusetts Promotes Public Health**

The *Health Now!* Massachusetts campaign brings together a broad-based alliance that includes consumer health care, tobacco control and public health advocates, physicians, nurses, hospitals, and other health care providers, insurers, labor unions, and grassroots supporters.

The *Health Now!* legislation increases the tobacco excise tax by 50-cents per pack, raising approximately \$158 million annually. The bill will also leverage matching federal funds of over \$200 million. Our goal is to earmark these funds to:

#### **1. Expand Coverage and Support Existing Health Care Commitments**

Thousands of Massachusetts residents still lack healthcare. *Health Now!* will provide affordable health care to a substantial portion of Massachusetts’ residents currently living without health insurance. The bill will expand MassHealth and other public initiatives aimed at uninsured, low-income workers without minor children, parents of children already eligible for benefits, and 19 and 20 year olds, while maintaining the current level of health care coverage for children and seniors.

#### **2. Reduce Youth and Adult Tobacco Use**

Tobacco use is the #1 cause of preventable death and disease in the country. Increasing the tobacco tax will directly reduce tobacco use among youth and adults, saving thousands of lives every year, and *Health Now!* will ensure that tobacco treatment options are available through all state health care programs.

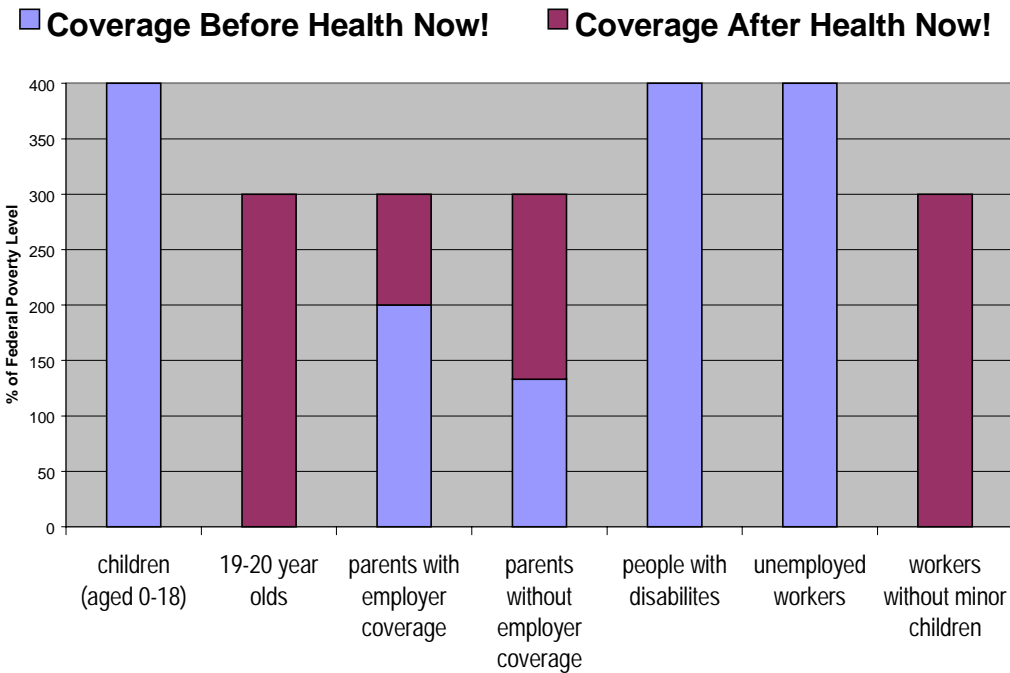
#### **3. Invest in Public Health**

*Health Now!* supports an expanded, more comprehensive community health worker program to educate, inform and reach out to under-served populations throughout the state, improving access to prevention efforts and primary care. In addition, new health care coverage, partnered with community health worker outreach programs, helps to address racial and ethnic disparities in quality health care.

#### **4. Stabilize and Strengthen Our Health Care Delivery System**

*Health Now!* will reduce demand on the Free Care Pool through expanded health care coverage and will direct revenues to the Free Care Pool, thus reducing its shortfall. This will protect hospitals and health centers that depend on the Pool for payments to care for the uninsured.

## HEALTH NOW! EXPANDS HEALTH CARE COVERAGE AND BENEFITS TO THE UNINSURED WHILE SUPPORTING OUR EXISTING HEALTH CARE COMMITMENTS.



In 1996, a 25-cent tobacco excise tax was passed and has funded health care programs for over 250,000 children, low-income adults, people with disabilities and seniors.

Despite this progress, nearly 400,000 Massachusetts residents remain uninsured, including parents, older adolescents, and low-income workers. While about 6% of Massachusetts residents overall are now uninsured, 18% of low-income adults are uninsured.

*133% Federal Poverty Level: for a family of one is \$11,425 and for a family of three is \$19,458.  
200% Federal Poverty Level: for a family of one is \$17,180 and for a family of three is \$29,260.*

## HEALTH NOW! REDUCES YOUTH AND ADULT TOBACCO USE AND SAVES LIVES.

Tobacco use kills over 10,000 people every year in Massachusetts – that's 28 people every day. Increasing the tobacco tax is the single most effective way to reduce smoking rates, significantly decreasing youth smoking rates and saving over 8,000 lives from tobacco-related deaths in our state over the next five years.

- Raising the cigarette tax by 50-cents per pack will decrease the number of youth smokers in Massachusetts by 8.5% and will reduce overall cigarette consumption by 3% – 5%.
- Youth, minority and low-income smokers are two to three times more likely to quit or smoke less than other smokers in response to price increases.
- A 50-cent increase in the cigarette tax will prevent 28,000 Massachusetts kids from falling prey to the addiction, death, and disease caused by smoking.
- To help smokers quit, *Health Now!* ensures that tobacco treatment programs are provided by all state-based health care programs, including Medicaid, MassHealth and the Children's and the Adult Medical Security Plans.



\*Number of kids saved from addiction, death and disease from tobacco. Source: Impact Teen, Teasdale et al study April 2001.

## HEALTH NOW! INVESTS IN PUBLIC HEALTH.

*Health Now!* provides funding to expand the supply of community health workers, a group of outreach educators, health educators, and health advisors. Community health workers promote healthy living by educating community members about disease and injury prevention, intervention, and treatment. They assist community members in better understanding and accessing health and human services systems, particularly in low income, minority, and immigrant communities where the rate of uninsurance is highest and where people have had to rely most heavily on emergency care.

The expanded community health worker program will:

- Help people use primary care instead of expensive emergency care and hospitalization
- Reach out to underserved populations, serving as bilingual and bicultural resources
- Assist community members in enrolling in health insurance programs
- Engage in community-based health education, including the dangers of tobacco use

*Through their work, community health workers will help to address the disparities in quality health care among racial and ethnic minorities in the Commonwealth by increasing use of preventative services, heightening awareness of health risks, and connecting people to appropriate, culturally competent services.*

Finally, Health Now! will improve access to regular primary care and prevention services because 85,000 new people will have health coverage.

## HEALTH NOW! WILL HELP STABILIZE OUR HEALTH CARE DELIVERY SYSTEM.

- Demand on the Free Care Pool will decline as more people become insured for their medical care, the number of smoking-related illnesses decreases, and the overall health of the public, specifically low-income individuals, improves.
- *Health Now!* will provide \$50 million in federal matching funds for the Free Care Pool to reduce its projected shortfall. In addition the bill provides \$50 million from the new tobacco tax revenue to cover deficits in the existing MassHealth programs for children and others.
- The bill includes necessary MassHealth rate increases in the estimated costs of the new access programs.
- The legislation also seeks federal matching funds for the prescription drug program for seniors and people with disabilities, helping to stabilize the program and make prescription drugs affordable to low-income people.

## Alliance for a Healthy New England

The *Health Now!* campaign is affiliated with the *Alliance for a Healthy New England*, a six-state initiative spearheaded by the American Cancer Society, Community Catalyst and the New England Council of Medical Societies. The Alliance seeks to increase tobacco taxes in each of the six New England states with the dual goal of decreasing tobacco use among children and adults and increasing access to health care, particularly for the uninsured. The Alliance is leading a coordinated approach to the tobacco tax increase, while each state coalition has determined its own goals for the specific use of the funds.

## Facts:

- Due to the success of the health care coverage expansion passed in 1996, the rate of uninsurance in Massachusetts has dropped from 9.9% in 1997 to 5.9% in 2000. Only 3% of children are uninsured.
- Unfortunately, nearly 400,000 people in Massachusetts remain uninsured, and three quarters of these individuals are working.
- Uninsured people are more than three times as likely to go without a needed doctor's visit, which can lead to missed diagnoses, untreated conditions, poor health and death.
- Lower income adults and racial and ethnic minorities are disproportionately uninsured. Latinos are three times as likely to be uninsured as whites and twice as many African Americans are uninsured. The high rate of uninsurance is one cause of health disparities in these communities, which have higher rates of infant mortality, heart disease, cancer, diabetes and AIDS.
- Tobacco use compounds the health care crisis. Over 10,000 people die from a tobacco-related illness every year in Massachusetts – that's 28 people every day!
- In Massachusetts, 30% of high school students currently smoke. 24,000 children become new daily smokers each year in the state, and if current trends continue, 105,000 children currently living in Massachusetts will eventually die from a smoking-related illness.
- A 50-cent increase in the cigarette tax will prevent 28,000 Massachusetts kids from falling prey to the addiction, death and disease caused by smoking.
- The Commonwealth currently spends \$2.5 billion annually to cover increased medical care and lost worker productivity caused by tobacco-related illnesses.

## Supporters of Health Now! Massachusetts

The *Health Now!* Massachusetts coalition of almost 60 organizations brings together consumer health care, tobacco control and public health advocates, health care providers, labor unions, insurers and grassroots supporters. Representative Rachel Kaprielian, Senators Mark Montigny, Linda Melconian and Richard Moore are lead sponsors, with over 50 other legislators signed on as co-sponsors of the bill.

## Contact:

American Cancer Society for more information on the toll of tobacco use in Massachusetts:

**Gwen Stewart at (617) 556-7414**

Health Care For All for more information on the state of health care in Massachusetts:

**Marcia Hams at (617) 350-7279 x2917**

For more general information and action steps for how to get involved, visit the *Health Now! Massachusetts* link at **[www.hcfama.org](http://www.hcfama.org)**.