



To: The Honorable Governor Phil Scott
Senate Appropriations Committee
House Appropriations Committee
Joint Fiscal Committee

From: Amy Brewer, Chair, Vermont Tobacco Evaluation and Review Board (VTERB)

Copy: Theresa Utton, Staff Associate, Joint Fiscal Committee

RE: FY18 Budget Recommendation for the Tobacco Control Program
(Section 271 of Act 152 (2000), 18 V.S.A. chapter 225, 9505(9))

Date: October 15, 2017

The Vermont Tobacco Evaluation & Review Board and the VT Tobacco Control Program have succeeded in reducing youth cigarette smoking to 11%. We have succeeded in increasing the protections for all Vermonters from harmful secondhand smoke. We continue to offer tobacco users a variety of free cessation resources to meet individual needs through 802Quits, which supports tobacco users with sustained support to be successful.

Focusing on those successes, however, **masks the enormous challenges in successfully addressing tobacco use with vulnerable populations**, such as rural youth, low income Vermonters, pregnant women, and those who have mental health diagnoses and substance abuse challenges. Vermont's smoking rates among vulnerable populations are higher than the nation's, and Vermont cannot address the **\$348 million annual health care costs attributed tobacco use** without effectively addressing the tobacco use of its most vulnerable populations. Tobacco use is also a main contributor toward chronic disease, a priority of Vermont's 3-4-50 initiative.

Current and Continued Challenges:

- 35% of our low income adult residents are smokers;
- 18% of all adult residents smoke cigarettes, a level that has remained unchanged since 2012;
- 25% of all Vermont High School students have used some sort of tobacco product (cigarette, smokeless, cigar or electronic or vaping product) in the *past 30 days*. This figure is as high as 33% in some supervisory union regions; and
- Electronic Cigarette, or vaping, use among high school students is at 15% (now higher than cigarette use by teens). The long-term impact of these products is unknown, but it is agreed that nicotine exposure to youth from e-cigarette use creates greater risk for future addiction. Current uptake trends by youth are alarming.

Funding for the VT Tobacco Control Program has been reduced over the past several years including the FY18 **elimination** of the evaluation of the program and the Board Administrator position. **To move back toward a comprehensive, effective tobacco control program that saves significant healthcare dollars (an estimated \$1.43 billion savings in smoking-related healthcare costs including \$586 million in Medicaid costs since 2001) and reduces disease and death, the VTERB recommends a FY19 budget of \$5,651,123, the same recommendation as FY18 and justified in the 2017 Annual Report.**

A sustainability plan to fund the program predictably into the future was proposed and submitted at the request of the Legislature. It includes:

- Dedicating a percentage of tobacco product excise taxes to the Tobacco Control Program; other states that have done this are seeing significant reductions in tobacco use,
- Increasing excise taxes on tobacco products which increases cessation and reduces youth use, and
- Appropriating monies the state receives that were withheld from the tobacco industry.

The ability for the program to function efficiently and effectively while saving Vermont significant health care dollars and supporting Vermont's most vulnerable populations has been reduced. Furthermore, program partners such as VDH and AOE have also received reduced funds and there are major gaps in local initiatives across the state. Much of Chittenden, Addison, Rutland, and Orange Counties have access to neither a locally-focused coalition nor a funded school district for youth prevention efforts.

The VT Tobacco Evaluation and Review Board will release its Annual Report this January. In that report you will find more details about how sustained funding for a comprehensive tobacco program maximizes Vermont's investments in achieving health care savings, greater health equity and healthier Vermonters. Additionally, the Tobacco Control State Plan can be found at the VTERB website at:

<http://humanservices.vermont.gov/boards-committees/tobacco-board/documents-and-resources/vermont-tobacco-control-workplan/view>.