

Sustaining State Funding



for Tobacco Control

S N A P S H O T F R O M
V I R G I N I A

"From 2.5 Cents to Common Sense"

BACKGROUND

- To meet the funding recommendations in the CDC's *Best Practices* document, Virginia would need to spend at least \$38.9 million a year on its comprehensive tobacco control program. The state currently spends \$13 million a year on tobacco prevention and control.
- Virginians For a Healthy Future was founded in 2002 with a mission to improve the health, education, and welfare of children, families, and communities by reducing the use of tobacco products in Virginia.
- Prior to 2004, Virginia's cigarette excise tax was only 2.5 cents per pack, the lowest in the nation.



What did Virginians For a Healthy Future and other tobacco control advocates WANT?

- To raise the cigarette excise tax from 2.5 cents to the national average, which at the time was 75 cents. This was also the minimum target agreed to by the Southern Neighbors Collaborative, a partnership of public health organizations in Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia focused on bringing the benefits of higher cigarette taxes to southern, tobacco-producing states.
- To also tax tobacco products other than cigarettes.
- To avoid splintering the coalition by publicly promoting a specific use for the tax proceeds.

WHO could make the tax increase a reality?

- Governor
- Senate finance chair
- House majority leader

WHAT did the legislators need to hear?

- That Virginia's cigarette excise tax was the lowest in the nation and hadn't been raised for 37 years.
- That a tobacco excise tax increase would benefit public health and could be used to ease the state budget situation.
- That poll results indicated a majority of Virginians of both parties favored a tobacco excise tax increase, even within tobacco-growing communities.

WHAT did Virginians For a Healthy Future get?

- A per-pack excise tax increase of 20 cents in September 2004 and an additional 10 cents in July 2005.
- A 10% tax on tobacco products other than cigarettes that also went into effect in September 2004.
- The creation of the Health Care Trust Fund. Money raised from excise taxes on tobacco products will be deposited in this fund and used solely to provide health care services, including prevention.

From WHOM did the legislators need to hear these messages?

- From a broad-based coalition that included representatives from the Virginia Education Association and the American Association of Retired Persons.
- Public citizens who agreed to come forward to talk about what the excise tax increase would mean to them.
- Voluntary health organizations such as the American Cancer Society, the American Heart Association, and the American Lung Association.

HOW did advocates get legislators to hear their messages?

- Through constant, ongoing, and consistent messages, that Virginia had the lowest cigarette excise tax in the nation and that the state had to move from "2.5 Cents to Common Sense."
- Through the use of giveaway items such as candy and gum attached to fact sheet cards with constantly changing messages about the importance of increasing the tobacco excise tax.
- Through radio and TV advertising paid for by private voluntary health organizations.
- Through a Web site that helped people learn how to get involved in the campaign to raise tobacco excise taxes.

For further information, please contact

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
 National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion
 Office on Smoking and Health
 4770 Buford Highway NE • Mailstop K-50 • Atlanta, GA 30341-3717
 Telephone: 770/488-5705. Press 3 for a specialist.
www.cdc.gov/tobacco/sustainingstates
 Email: tobaccoinfo@cdc.gov

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
 CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION