



## News

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### **Cigarette Tax Hike Finds Overwhelming Support in State 77 percent of those surveyed support increasing the tax**

**MADISON (February 24, 2005)---** A majority of Wisconsin's voters—77 percent—favor a \$1 per pack hike in the cigarette tax and devoting the revenue to health care programs. When asked if they would reelect a politician who had promised to not raise taxes—but then voted for an increase in the cigarette tax once elected—79 percent of respondents said it would either make no difference at all, or would actually make them more likely to vote for that politician. That sentiment is derived from a bi-partisan sampling of 500 Wisconsin voters, including current smokers.

Without question, Wisconsin's political environment is extremely anti-tax. But, that is largely focused on property taxes. An overwhelming majority of voters surveyed in a poll sponsored by the Wisconsin Hospital Association (WHA) and the American Cancer Society (ACS) said that an increase in the tobacco tax on cigarettes is a political winner, and a preferred way to fund state health care programs. The poll was conducted on January 24 and 25 by Public Opinion Strategies.

Importantly, voters strongly reject cutting spending on health care for programs like Medicaid (82 percent). And the idea of using new tobacco tax revenue to pay for health care programs, including Medicaid, is universally embraced. It is estimated the Medicaid program spends more than \$375 million each year in the treatment of smoking-related illnesses.

Support for the \$1 a pack increase in the cigarette tax crosses party and regional lines. Support is highest in Madison, where 85 percent of those surveyed say they approved of a \$1 increase, followed closely by 82 percent in Wausau/Rhineland, 76 percent in Green Bay/Appleton, 74 percent in La Crosse/Eau Claire, and 74 percent in Milwaukee. Support was lowest in the northern region of the state, but even there, a strong majority (69 percent) indicated that they supported an increase in the tax.

According to the poll, increasing the cigarette tax enjoys massive support across party lines, with 72 percent of Republicans, 76 percent of Independents and 83 percent of Democrats supporting a \$1 increase.

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\$1 Increase in Cigarette Tax Release

"We've all known for a long time that raising the cigarette tax is good health care policy, that evidence is overwhelming and undeniable," said WHA Senior Vice President Eric Borgerding. "Unfortunately the cigarette tax has become mired in political paranoia associated with other taxes. But the reality, as shown in the poll, is that this is a political slam-dunk. There is no reason for a politician in any part of the state to fear a cigarette tax increase, in fact, it should be embraced."

American Cancer Society Wisconsin Legislative Liaison Alison Prange said raising the tax by \$1 on a pack of cigarettes will cause 44,000 adult smokers to quit, while "the number of kids who would not even try their first cigarette (72,000) would almost fill Camp Randall Stadium."

"In the Medicaid program," Prange continued, "14 percent of all funds are used for treating smoking-related illnesses." She noted that the actual cost of a pack of cigarettes, factoring in the health costs associated with smoking, is \$7.14. Prange added, "Raising the tax will prevent almost 10,000 deaths associated with smoking in Wisconsin over a five-year period. The health benefits are undeniable."

William Scheckler, MD, chair of the Wisconsin Medical Society's Council on the Health of the Public, agrees.

"Raising the cigarette tax by a dollar per pack is an absolutely fool proof way to save lives and reduce health costs," said Dr. Scheckler, an internal medicine specialist in Madison. "It has worked every single time, in every single state and Wisconsin will enjoy the same health benefits," he added.

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We have graphics (charts, graphs, and statistics) you can use with this story in PDF and EPS formats. They are posted at [www.wha.org](http://www.wha.org), or call Mary Kay at 608-274-1820 or [mgrasmick@wha.org](mailto:mgrasmick@wha.org) and I will email them directly to you.

This news release and supporting documents are posted on the Wisconsin Hospital Association Web site: [www.wha.org](http://www.wha.org) and at Wisconsin Medical Society: [www.wisconsinmedicalsociety.org](http://www.wisconsinmedicalsociety.org) For more information on research, advocacy, and services provided by the American Cancer Society, go to: [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org). For information on smoking prevention efforts, see: [www.smokefreewi.org](http://www.smokefreewi.org)