

# Coalition for a Tobacco-Free West Virginia

## Position Statement on Tobacco Excise Taxes

**Position:** *The Coalition for a Tobacco-Free West Virginia supports a significant increase in West Virginia's tobacco excise tax. Increasing tobacco excise taxes is the single most effective strategy in reducing tobacco use, particularly among children. It is a key component in a comprehensive tobacco use prevention program.*

The Coalition for a Tobacco-Free West Virginia seeks to reduce or eliminate tobacco use by West Virginia citizens, especially children, and to eliminate the exposure to secondhand tobacco smoke, which is the third leading cause of preventable death among nonsmokers.

West Virginia is a leader in many tobacco use categories. Smoking among youth ranks in the top five in the nation and smokeless tobacco use is number one in the nation. West Virginia also has the highest rate of smoking during pregnancy in the country. The economic toll tobacco takes on human lives in West Virginia is enormous. The state spends almost \$900 million a year on the direct health care costs of smoking, according to the West Virginia Bureau for Public Health.

It is well documented that increasing the price of tobacco products is the single most effective strategy in reducing tobacco use, especially among youth. One way to increase the price is through excise taxes. The current West Virginia excise tax on cigarettes is 55 cents a pack. This tax was increased in 2003 yet remains well below the national average of 84 cents a pack (as of Jan. 1, 2005). With the current tax on cigarettes West Virginia is ranked 34<sup>th</sup> among 50 states and the District of Columbia (as of January 2005).

The Coalition for a Tobacco-Free West Virginia supports a significant increase of excise tax on cigarettes and an equivalent increase in the excise tax on the wholesale price of all other tobacco products.

The excise tax on cigarettes and other tobacco products will provide not only one of the best mechanisms for reducing youth tobacco use, but also has the potential to bring in substantial revenue.