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Hawaii Department of Health Urges Protection of Tobacco Settlement Special Funds to Continue Prevention Programs

HONOLULU – The State of Hawaii began using Tobacco Settlement Special Funds (TSSF) to support tobacco and chronic disease prevention 15 years ago. However, over the years, the portions allotted to the Hawaii Department of Health and the Tobacco Prevention and Control Trust Fund, both of which fund various programs administered by the Department of Health, have been reduced. Funding for tobacco prevention and control programs is well below nationally recommended levels

“There has been a significant decrease in the amount of funds set aside for prevention from the Tobacco Settlement Special Fund,” said Director of Health Dr. Virginia Pressler. “As a result, Hawaii only spends 62 percent of the recommended tobacco prevention and control spending level set by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.”

Despite the decrease in funding, Hawaii has managed to make tremendous strides in tobacco prevention and control and has shown a tangible return on its investment in these programs from 2000 to 2013:

- At a time when one in five adults in Hawaii smoked, there was a 32 percent decrease in smoking. Hawaii now holds the distinction of having the third lowest adult smoking rate in the nation, at 13 percent.
- Smoking among youth also decreased 63 percent during this period.
- Hawaii conservatively saved a total of \$586 million dollars (\$586,350,000) on direct health care costs as a result of adults, youth and pregnant women who quit smoking and/or stopped using tobacco products. For every \$1.00 spent on tobacco prevention, \$4.73 was saved in direct health care costs.

In addition to saving on healthcare costs, Hawaii’s prevention efforts using the TSSF funds have resulted in better health outcomes for Hawaii’s residents: death rates from chronic diseases in Hawaii have also decreased significantly between the period of 2001-2003 and 2011-2013 (3 year aggregate), falling 34 percent for heart disease, 41 percent for stroke, and 11 percent for lung cancer.

TSSF dollars are the main source of funding for primary prevention and chronic disease management for the entire state, which was the original intent of the TSSF. The 25-year Master Settlement Agreement between the 46 states, District of Columbia and U.S. territories and the tobacco industry in 1998 delineated that the funding be used for "...the advancement of public health, the implementation of important tobacco-related public health measures."

A portion of the TSSF payment is distributed to both the Hawaii Department of Health and the Hawaii Tobacco Prevention and Control Trust Fund, which in turn fund the Department of Health's various prevention and chronic disease management programs. While the original percentage of the TSSF allocated to Department of Health and the Tobacco and Prevention and Control Trust Fund was 25 percent each, this amount has fluctuated from 0 percent to 12.5 percent since fiscal year 2010 due to tough decisions made by legislators to balance the State budget during the recession and budget shortfalls.

Currently, the Department of Health receives 15 percent of the total annual funding, or about \$7.5 million of the \$50 million TSSF payment to Hawaii. The Hawaii Tobacco Prevention and Control Trust Fund receives 6.5 percent, or roughly \$3 million, of the TSSF payment to Hawaii.

By law, the portion for the Department of Health's prevention and chronic disease management share should go back to 25 percent in fiscal year 2016. However, the Hawaii Tobacco Prevention and Control Trust Fund allocation will only increase to 12.5 percent -- half of the original percentage. By fiscal year 2018, however, the total payments from the TSSF to Hawaii are projected to decrease from the current annual amount of \$50 million to about \$41 million, and this may have a corresponding impact on the allocation for prevention and chronic disease management.

"These funds are essential to protect the health and quality of life of the people of Hawaii," said Lola Irvin, Manager of the Tobacco Settlement Project. "The TSSF has enabled Hawaii to make significant strides in policy, systems and environmental changes across the spectrum of chronic disease prevention and management. "

TSSF has funded critical programs in our state, such as the implementation and monitoring of school Wellness Guidelines that establish standards for health and well-being in Hawaii public schools, public education that promotes healthy behaviors such as "Rethink Your Drink," which encourages drinking water and other healthy beverages instead of sugary drinks, and the Hawaii Tobacco QuitLine.

Since 2005, the Hawaii Tobacco QuitLine has provided free telephone counseling services and is staffed 24/7 by professional cessation coaches who provide assistance to all adult tobacco users, free of charge, regardless of whether they have insurance. To date, the QuitLine has assisted more than 22,000 Hawaii residents quit smoking, and continues to answer calls from nearly 400 people per month. Dr. Elizabeth Tam,

Chair of the Hawaii Tobacco Prevention and Control Advisory Board, is featured in the latest QuitLine ads, which debuts at today's news conference.

For more information on TSSF-funded programs, please visit www.healthyhawaii.com or <http://hawaiiitquitline.org>.

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