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American Lung Association Response to New Institute of Medicine Report

Statement from National President and CEO of the American Lung Association Harold P. Wimmer, in response to the IOM Report “Public Health Implications of Raising the Minimum Age of Legal Access to Tobacco Products”

CHICAGO (March 12, 2015) – The Institute of Medicine (IOM) report finds that raising the minimum age for legal purchase to at least 21 years old will significantly reduce smoking rates. This report contains important findings that will help inform new policies that the IOM says could prevent about 223,000 deaths among people born between 2000 to 2019, including 50,000 fewer dying from lung cancer, the nation’s leading cancer killer.

The new report “Public Health Implications of Raising the Minimum Age of Legal Access to Tobacco Products” concluded that increasing the minimum age of sale for tobacco products could benefit public health by reducing youth tobacco use. The report found that tobacco use would decrease by 12 percent by the time today’s teenagers were adults if the minimum age of sale were increased to 21 years.

The American Lung Association supports increasing the minimum age of sale of tobacco products. This new report from the IOM provides important evidence and shows that states and local communities should consider increasing the minimum age of sale for tobacco products as a potential policy to reduce youth tobacco use among other proven policies such as increasing taxes on tobacco products and passing comprehensive smokefree workplace laws.

Most states have set the minimum age of sale for tobacco products at age 18, but four states – Alabama, Alaska, New Jersey and Utah – have set the age of sale at age 19. New York City and smaller communities in several states have increased the age of sale to 21 years old. The state of Hawaii is currently considering increasing its age of sale to 21. With powerful evidence from the prestigious IOM, other states and communities can now move forward to increase the minimum age.

The completion of this report was required of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) by the 2009 Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act, which gave FDA the authority to regulate tobacco products.

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About the American Lung Association

The American Lung Association is the leading organization working to save lives by improving lung health and preventing lung disease, through research, education and advocacy. The work of the American Lung Association is focused on four strategic imperatives: to defeat lung cancer; to improve the air we breathe; to reduce the burden of lung disease on individuals and their families; and to eliminate tobacco use and tobacco-related diseases. For more information about the American Lung Association, a holder of the Better Business Bureau Wise Giving Guide Seal, or to support the work it does, call 1-800-LUNGUSA (1-800-586-4872) or visit: Lung.org.

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