

April 11, 2018

**Testimony by Tina Zuk, Government Relations Director, VT
American Heart Association
Senate Finance Committee
Section 10-10a, H.922**

The American Heart Association supports a tax on e-cigarettes that is at a rate high enough to discourage use by youth and to use the funds for tobacco prevention. **We urge the committee to increase the proposed excise tax on e-cigarettes to 92% of wholesale and invest the revenue in Vermont's tobacco control program.**

E-cigarettes are now the most commonly used tobacco product by middle and high school students. With 15% of Vermont youth currently using e-cigarettes we are concerned about:

1. the health impacts on Vermont youth, especially concerning nicotine's impact on brain development
2. the possibility of increased use by youth of traditional tobacco products.

E-cigs link to smoking:

- The 2016 Surgeon General's Report found that "e-cigarette use is strongly associated with the use of other tobacco products among youth and young adults." In 2015, among high school students who used e-cigarettes, 58.8 % also smoked at least two types of combustible products, and 77% also smoked at least 2 types of combustible products and used other tobacco products such as smokeless tobacco.
- A study by Dartmouth's Norris Cotton Cancer Center published in March found that e-cigarettes may facilitate smoking initiation in adolescents. In fact, the study concluded that e-cigarettes could lead to more than 1.5 million years of life lost because their use could substantially increase the number of adolescents and young adults who eventually become cigarette smokers.

Using the funds for tobacco prevention and media:

- H.922 as proposed raises \$385,000. We encourage the committee to put the more than \$700,000 that could be raised by doubling that amount towards Vermont's

tobacco control program to gain an even greater return on investment, especially if the funds were used for media.

- Additional media spending is necessary. Tobacco companies spend \$17 million marketing their products in Vermont each year.
- Vermont's tobacco control program currently spends \$923,000 on media. Hard-hitting media campaigns like Quit Tips work. The Vermont Department of Health has seen calls to the quitline increase by 33% when media campaigns are running. But there currently isn't enough funding to make the kind of impact we'd like. Declines in adult smoking rates have stalled and no funds are going to youth media campaigns.
- According to the CDC, if Vermont invested the minimum recommended amount of **\$1.1 million** into media and counter-marketing, the program could run an additional 6-8 adult cessation campaigns each year. The anticipated result of investing this funding would be lower adult prevalence from **17% to 15%**.

This funding would provide a substantial return on investment. Evaluation of Vermont's tobacco control program has found that with the \$72 million the state invested in tobacco control between 2001 and 2014, it realized \$1.43 billion in health care savings.

Funding tobacco prevention has been proven to reduce smoking, save lives, and health care spending. High costs for tobacco products have been shown to be a deterrent to youth who are price sensitive. Please increase the e-cigarette tax and use the funds to ensure our youth don't get hooked on either cigarettes or e-cigarettes.