



February 21, 2023

To: Senate and House Appropriations Committees

From: Tina Zuk, Government Relations Director, American Heart Association

Re: Proposed FY2024 Budget

Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify. I'm Tina Zuk, VT Government Relations Director for the American Heart Association. We'd appreciate your support for the following three areas.

1. Please support at least the \$48 million for the Child Care Financial Assistance Program expansion in the governor's budget proposal as a good first step towards long-term transformation of Vermont's early childcare system.

We know that an important driver in lifelong health, including heart health, is high-quality early childhood education. Research shows high-quality birth-to-five programs can lead to better outcomes in education, health, social behaviors, and employment.

2. Please support continued state funding for Universal school meals. JFO estimates between \$26-\$31 million to ensure VT students continue to receive breakfast and lunch during the school day. This would be a wise investment, eliminating hunger and stigma for Vermont youth while strengthening learning and positive outcomes later in life.
3. Please provide an additional \$1.7 million in base funding for Vermont's Tobacco Control Program -- Though the legislature allocated an additional \$1 million for Vermont's Tobacco Control Program last year, it was one-time and directed to the Department of Substance Use to address youth vaping which, while positive, does not address the epidemic of tobacco use in Vermont.

There is great need and there are resources available that should be directed to address what is still the number one most preventable cause of death and disease.

- o The cost of tobacco use is still high and more needs to be done to address high-use populations – Though youth smoking is low, electronic vaping products are a significant problem with 26% of VT high school students now vaping. And studies show that youth who vape are 4x more likely to smoke.

We still have a number of populations with very high smoking rates:
COPD – 54%, diabetes – 31%, less than a HS education – 43%, disabled – 32%, uninsured – 28%, rent – 27%, low income – 25%

- The \$1 million in one-time funds allocated to DSU this past session went to address vaping of all substances and was spread over three years with \$200k allocated to prevention coalitions and only \$100k allocated each year for media. This didn't even come close to replacing the loss of \$1 million in one-time funds that the tobacco control program had previously for media.
- The majority of tobacco industry Master Settlement (MSA) payments are NOT going towards tobacco prevention – This past year Vermont received \$26,177,953. Though there are no strings attached to the funds, and states will receive them in perpetuity, the intent of the lawsuits and resulting settlement with states was to address the harms of tobacco.

Yet, of the amount above, only \$2,053,149 of the MSA funds go to the tobacco control program. \$213,843 goes to DLL, \$750,388 goes to AOE and \$1,088,918 goes to VDH. This means \$24,124,804 goes elsewhere!

In last year's budget, \$21,049,373 of the master settlement funds went to the HHS Secretary's office, \$348,000 went to the AGO, \$949,917 went to ADAP and \$1 million in one-time funds went to the renamed DSU for youth vaping.

- The cost of not adequately funding tobacco prevention and cessation is increasing – For years, the estimated annual cost of Vermont treating illnesses caused by tobacco-use was \$348 million, including \$87.2 million in Medicaid costs.

However, the National Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids recently determined that this cost has grown and is now \$404 million annually, include \$93 million in Medicaid costs to treat tobacco-caused illnesses in Vermont.

- The Tobacco Control Program has a track record of effectiveness but adult smoking and youth vaping rates are a problem -- Early in-depth evaluation of the program found that in its first 14 years, with a \$73 million investment, the program saved \$1.43 billion in overall smoking-related health care costs, including \$586 million in Medicaid costs.
- Since the program began in 2001, the adult smoking rate has dropped from 22% to 16% currently and the youth rate dropped from 33% to 7%!

However, the adult smoking rate increased 2% in the past two years and more than a quarter of Vermont high school students now vape.

The additional funding would help the Department of Health target priority populations and utilize increased media funding to change norms with youth.

Thank you in advance for considering our requests.