



April 27, 2009

**Press Release: Benefits of Cigarette Tax Increase**  
(for immediate release)

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**SC Fair Share**



**New Report: Raising Cigarette Taxes Across the South Offers Relief for Regional Budget and Health Problems**

*Accompanying Web-Based Tool Shows Significant South Carolina Specific Benefits of Tax Increase*

**Columbia, SC** - Raising the cigarette tax in South Carolina by \$1 per pack would help ease the economic crisis that weighs heavily on the region, the state and its hard-working families, and would also improve the health of its residents, according to a report released today by the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN) and Community Catalyst. The report, "Big Benefits from \$1: Raising Cigarette Taxes in the South to Boost Health and the Economy," is supplemented by a new Web-based interactive tool that details state-by-state benefits of a \$1 tax increase.

[www.communitycatalyst.org/projects/southern\\_campaign](http://www.communitycatalyst.org/projects/southern_campaign)

In the current economic crisis, South Carolina and other Southern states have been particularly hard hit by budget shortfalls and high rates of tobacco-related diseases that are costly to treat, yet easy to prevent. The region also has an increasing number of families without health insurance or who are at risk of losing coverage from budget cuts and job losses.

"The current economic crisis provides a unique opportunity for lawmakers in South Carolina and across the South to rise above partisan politics and take decisive leadership on an issue that will not only ensure revenue for critical health programs like Medicaid but will also positively impact the health of their constituents," said John Ruoff of SC Fair Share. "A \$1 increase in the cigarette tax will clearly help reduce tobacco use, provide increased access to care for many hardworking families and ultimately help make all sectors of society more productive."

According to the report, a \$1 per pack increase in each of 13 Southern states - Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia - would raise nearly \$3.3 billion in the first year alone for cash-starved state budgets, bolstering the regional economy.

If used to fund health insurance through state Medicaid programs, the money would ensure that hundreds of thousands of families get the health care they need and would help secure as much as \$35 billion in matching federal funds for the South in the first two years.

"Medicaid funding supports health care providers - doctors, hospitals and health centers - in every community. This investment multiplies as Medicaid spending ripples through state economies, spurring additional business activity, as health facilities buy supplies and health care workers spend their wages," said Sue Berkowitz of SC Appleseed. "The investment is multiplied again and again, reaching every corner of every state."

According to the report and Web site, in South Carolina, the \$1 tax increase would raise \$180 million to help fill a budget gap of \$871 million and to reduce smoking-related health costs, which now total \$1.1 billion each year.

If used to provide health insurance for struggling families through the Medicaid program in South Carolina, a \$1 increase would bring in \$421 million in matching federal funds and could lower the percent of uninsured parents to 2%.

The tax would have the added benefit of reducing the number of teenagers who smoke from 52,000 to 42,800, an 18% decrease. Cigarette taxes in the Southern states are among the lowest in the

nation. In South Carolina, the current tax is 7 cents, which ranks at 51 nationally.

South Carolina campaign to raise the cigarette tax by \$1 is part of a wave of action across the South that is supported through a new partnership of Community Catalyst, a national non-profit organization working to ensure quality, affordable health care for everyone, and ACS CAN, the advocacy affiliate of the American Cancer Society. The partnership aims to help Southern states raise cigarette taxes to improve the health and the economy of the region.

ACS CAN and Community Catalyst's regional report and the online map of the Southern states highlight the positive impact of a \$1 per pack increase in the cigarette tax. The map allows easy comparisons across the states and includes the voices of some local consumers who support the tax increase.

[www.communitycatalyst.org/projects/southern\\_campaign](http://www.communitycatalyst.org/projects/southern_campaign)

**Information provided in cooperation with these local contacts:**

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***ACS CAN, the nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy affiliate of the American Cancer Society, supports evidence-based policy and legislative solutions designed to eliminate cancer as a major health problem. ACS CAN works to encourage elected officials and candidates to make cancer a top national priority. ACS CAN gives ordinary people extraordinary power to fight cancer with the training and tools they need to make their voices heard. For more information, visit [www.acscan.org](http://www.acscan.org).***

***Community Catalyst is a national non-profit advocacy organization dedicated to making quality, affordable health care accessible to everyone. Since 1997, Community Catalyst has worked to build consumer and community leadership to transform the American health care system. With the belief that this transformation will happen when consumers are fully engaged and have an organized voice, Community Catalyst works in partnership with national, state and local consumer organizations, policymakers and foundations, providing leadership and support to change the health care system so it serves everyone—especially vulnerable members of society. [www.communitycatalyst.org](http://www.communitycatalyst.org)***

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## About Us...

South Carolina Appleseed Legal Justice Center is dedicated to advocacy for low income people in South Carolina to effect systemic change by acting in and through the courts, legislature, administrative agencies, community and the media, and helping others do the same through education, training and co-counseling.

**South Carolina Appleseed Legal Justice Center**

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