



NEXT GENERATION
CALIFORNIA TOBACCO CONTROL ALLIANCE

For Immediate Release

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Statewide Nonprofit Collaborative Helping California Make Early Progress Toward National Initiative

April 21, 2003 (SACRAMENTO, CA): While the federal government recently released important recommendations for increasing the health of Americans, the Next Generation California Tobacco Control Alliance (NGA) has been working for four years to put Californians' health ahead of the curve.

Last Tuesday, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) launched a \$15 million dollar initiative to fight chronic disease. The Steps to a HealthierUS initiative identifies tobacco use as the leading preventable cause of death in the United States. HHS calls on policy makers to implement strategies to decrease tobacco use, including **improved insurance coverage of smoking cessation services, and greater involvement of health providers and health care systems in the routine delivery of cessation advice and services.**

"The recommendations around smoking cessation in the national initiative are a welcome sign," declared Traci Verardo, Executive Director of the Next Generation California Tobacco Control Alliance. "NGA has been developing strategies to improve the health of California smokers by ensuring access to treatments and services and we look forward to the Steps to a HealthierUS initiative helping California achieve that goal."

In recognition of the fact that smoking is the leading cause of PREVENTABLE death in the United States and in California, NGA has convened a collaborative of health insurers, purchasers, providers, researchers and advocates to raise the bar on insurance coverage for cessation services and health provider delivery of cessation advice and counseling in California. The collaborative has designed an evidence-based, model smoking cessation benefit for health insurance coverage and is developing a campaign to advocate that California managed care plans adopt it as part of standard benefit coverage.

The model benefit includes full coverage for a range of medications and counseling programs that are effective in helping people quit. Under NGA's proposal, all California managed care enrollees would have access to the benefit as part of standard care. With 21 million Californians enrolled in HMOs, the managed care system is uniquely positioned to reach the state's 4 million smokers and help them quit.

NGA has also developed resources to educate health care providers about their important role in helping patients quit. Although 70% of smokers visit a physician at least once a year, only 46% of California smokers report being advised to quit smoking by their physician. This month, NGA will

be launching the Health Care Provider's Tool Kit for Delivering Smoking Cessation Services, a resource guide for health care practitioners.

“Smoking costs California \$8.6 billion in direct medical costs alone,” said Verardo. “Health insurers and providers know first-hand the toll that smoking takes on patient health and overall health care costs. Increasing access to services and intensifying efforts by health providers to help smokers quit is a great opportunity to improve health and save money.”

The Next Generation California Tobacco Control Alliance (NGA) is a statewide coalition working to reduce tobacco use in California. NGA accomplishes this through collaboration between traditional tobacco control constituencies and new partners not traditionally associated with tobacco control. Principal funding for NGA is provided by the SmokeLess States National Tobacco Policy Initiative, a program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

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