

UIC News Tips

University of Illinois at Chicago, Office of Public Affairs (MC 288), 601 S. Morgan St., Chicago, IL 60607-7113, (312) 996-3456, www.uic.edu/depts/paff

August 25, 1999

Contact: Jody Oesterreicher
Melanie Wakefield

(312) 996-8277; joest@uic.edu
(312) 413-0298; melaniew@uic.edu

UIC RESEARCH HELPS TARGET ALLOCATION OF TOBACCO-SETTLEMENT FUNDS

The most effective way to reduce teenage smoking is for states to concentrate on comprehensive tobacco-control programs, according to a University of Illinois at Chicago report. The UIC researchers hope their findings will help legislators justify higher funding for such programs.

“States can no longer use ‘lack of evidence for benefit’ as an argument to avoid allocating tobacco-settlement money to programs aimed at reducing teenage tobacco use, because those programs are the best buy for reducing teenage smoking,” says Melanie Wakefield, lead author of the report and visiting research scientist in UIC’s Health Research and Policy Centers.

Lobbying efforts by the tobacco industry undermine the impact of tobacco-control efforts, the report suggests. Research reviewed by the UIC team shows that the tobacco industry lobbies to divert funding away from tobacco control activities and encourages legislators to fund strategies that are least effective.

Other strategies employed by the tobacco industry to combat tobacco control programs include price discounting, new promotions and brand items, and advocating for smoke-free areas rather than total indoor smoking bans, according to the report.

Wakefield and Frank Chaloupka, UIC professor of economics, reviewed comprehensive tobacco control programs in California, Massachusetts, Oregon, Arizona and Florida.

They found evidence that each of the typical elements of comprehensive tobacco control programs can reduce teenage tobacco use.

“The research to date provides good reason to expect that price increases, restrictions on smoking in schools and public places, a complete ban on tobacco advertising, strongly enforced limits on youth access, and school-based prevention programs using a social influence approach – coupled with mass-reach counter-advertising campaigns – will lead to reductions in youth smoking,” Wakefield says.

“There is no magic bullet to reduce teenage tobacco smoking, and a community-wide sustained effort using multiple channels of influence has the most likelihood of producing real and durable changes in adolescent smoking.”

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Comprehensive tobacco-control programs usually combine a mix of the following elements:

- Public education through electronic, outdoor and print media that counters commercial cigarette advertising campaigns
- Community initiatives with local organizations facilitating worksite stop-smoking programs, training and assistance for health professionals to improve smoking cessation services, and policy development
- Development of school-based programs including curriculum, policy and prevention
- Stop-smoking services including telephone helplines
- Enforcement of policies to prevent youth access to tobacco, restrict tobacco advertising, and create smoke-free environments
- Research and evaluation of tobacco control efforts

The report was supported by grants from the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids and The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. It is available on the Internet at <http://www.uic.edu/orgs/impacteen> under "Publications."

With 25,000 students, the University of Illinois at Chicago is the largest and most diverse university in the Chicago area. UIC is home to the largest medical school in the United States and is one of the 88 leading research universities in the country. Located just west of Chicago's Loop, UIC is a vital part of the educational, technological and cultural fabric of the area.