

## **New Data Shows Smoking Rates Above State Average Among California's Ethnic and Gay and Lesbian Communities**

To: State Desk

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**SACRAMENTO, Calif., April 23 /U.S. Newswire/** -- Despite significant decreases in smoking among Californians overall, leaders representing the state's diverse populations voiced despair and anger today over new data which shows smoking prevalence remains high among California's ethnic and gay and lesbian communities.

According to the 2001 California Health Interview Survey (CHIS), conducted by the Center for Health Policy Research at the University of California, Los Angeles, gays and lesbians had a combined smoking prevalence of 30.8 percent, followed by American Indians (30.3 percent), African Americans (20.6 percent) and non-Hispanic whites (18.1 percent). Smoking prevalence was 21.4 percent among Asian males, and 19.5 percent among Hispanic/Latino males.

"Even though California has some of the most progressive tobacco control policies and the second lowest smoking rate in the nation, smoking disparities still exist in California's low-income, ethnic and gay and lesbian communities," said Dr. Lourdes Bezconde-Garbanti, Director of the Hispanic/Latino Tobacco Education Network at the University of Southern California. All of California's diverse communities should be able to benefit from the progress that has been made in tobacco control. By allocating as little as 20 cents of any tobacco tax increase, our leaders can ensure that vital tobacco education programs are supported and maintained."

The CHIS survey provides, for the first time, prevalence numbers specific to California's American Indian and gay and lesbian communities. Among gay men age 18 to 65 years old smoking prevalence was 33.2 percent, which is 54.4 percent more than all California men in the same age group. Among lesbians 18 to 65 years old, 25.3 percent smoked, which is 66.4 percent more than all California women in the same age group. American Indian women, at 31.5 percent, had the highest smoking rates among females.

"California's leaders need to look at the facts. The gay and lesbian community and the American Indian community both have prevalence rates nearly double that of the general population," said Bob Gordon of the San Francisco Tobacco-Free Project. The CHIS data also highlights the discouragingly high rates among men in the Hispanic/Latino, Asian/Pacific Islander, and African American communities. Korean men, at 35 percent, have the highest smoking prevalence among males.

"Spending \$3.2 million a day in California alone, the tobacco industry is aggressively targeting our communities in their relentless pursuit to attract new smokers. In the Hispanic community, for example, one tobacco company is spending more than \$64 million on advertising. Brands like Kool, Natural American Spirit, and Rio and special marketing promotions are all designed to attract and capitalize on smokers from our communities," said Beverly Jones-Wright, African American Tobacco Education Network member.

"Our diverse communities represent more than 52 percent of California's residents. The tobacco industry is targeting our men and women. Our leaders have a moral obligation to our children and our people to use tobacco tax funds to provide targeted tobacco use prevention and cessation programs. This is crucial to ensure that tobacco abuse is reduced. A 'one-size-fits' all approach will not work," stated Radley Davis, Inter-Tribal Council/Life Center Councilor and Chair of the American Indian Tobacco Education Network.

Every dollar invested in the California Tobacco Control Program saves the state at least \$3 in direct health care costs and another \$5 by reducing lost productivity. According to a report by the Institute for Health & Aging at the University of California, San Francisco, the cost of smoking in California is nearly \$16 billion annually or \$3,331 per smoker every year.

"Decreasing illness and death from tobacco-related diseases will significantly lower the emotional toll of tobacco abuse in our communities and the economic costs to our state. Our communities and our families deserve equal access and equal opportunity to tobacco use prevention and cessation," said Benjamin Nate, member of the Asian & Pacific Islander Tobacco Education Network. "We ask California leaders to have the political will to support and fund vital tobacco control programs."

The United Communities Against Tobacco Abuse represents California's diverse communities, including African American, American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian and Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latino, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people. The group united at the capitol today to educate leaders on the tobacco-related disparities faced by their communities.

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