



## **Position of the Iowa CareGivers Association on the Proposed Tobacco Tax Increase in Support of Health Care**

*Summary: 12% of Iowa's Certified Nurse Aides – the men and women who provide 80-90% of the direct hands-on care to those suffering from debilitating tobacco related illnesses – rely on public assistance for health care. Revenue generated through an increase in the tobacco tax in support of Medicaid would thus not only discourage the use of tobacco products in Iowa, but also benefit both those who receive care for their tobacco related illnesses and those who provide such care.*

The establishment of the Medicaid program by Congress in 1965 was an important promise to the most vulnerable members of our society—the elderly, people with disabilities, and low-income children and their families. It was now the policy of this nation that they could obtain the health care they needed in order to live as productively and independently as possible. The State of Iowa joined in this promise by pledging the resources necessary to match federal funds to ensure adequate health care and long term supports to Iowans most in need. The federal government and the State of Iowa must both keep this promise—or jeopardize the life and health of hundreds of thousands of Medicaid recipients in this state.

Direct care workers across the State of Iowa not only provide care for many of those who are dependent upon Medicaid, but are also themselves often recipients of publicly supported health care. Indeed, 12% of Certified Nurse Aides in Iowa rely on public assistance for health care coverage. Ironically, the men and women who provide an estimated 80-90% of the direct hands-on care for those in need of long-term care support oftentimes find themselves unable to afford proper health care coverage.

Our most vulnerable citizens cannot be expected to forgo the services necessary for their health, safety, and quality of life. Significant additional revenue must be generated, and the Iowa CareGivers Association joins with many other organizations and individuals calling for the immediate \$1 per pack tax increase on cigarettes, to be dedicated to health care. Widespread tobacco use has diminished the overall quality of health in the United States and has contributed to the strains that currently rack our nation's health care system. The effect an increase in the tobacco tax would have on Iowa's health care system would thus be doubly beneficial, as it would not only discourage the use of tobacco products among our citizens, but also augment the funds available for public health care in our state. Moreover, it must be remembered that direct care workers provide the majority of care for those suffering from the debilitating consequences of extensive tobacco use. It is therefore only appropriate that the revenue created by an increase in the tobacco tax be directed toward the Medicaid program, where it would benefit not only those who suffer from tobacco-related diseases, but also those who provide the personal care they need.

The Iowa CareGivers Association (ICA) is a non-profit, independent, professional association for Certified Nurse Aides, Home Care Aides, Patient Care Technicians, and other direct care workers. ICA partners with workers, providers, consumers, consumer advocates, policymakers, labor, educators and other individuals and entities committed to enhancing the quality and the availability of care in Iowa.

*ICA Mission: Enhancing the quality of care by providing education, recognition, advocacy, and research in support of direct care workers.*