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Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

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State smoking rate down 20 percent

Twenty-seven-thousand fewer adult smokers in Alaska since 1996

(Anchorage, AK) — Today officials with the Department of Health and Social Services' Alaska Tobacco Prevention and Control Program announced that the most recent behavioral surveys in Alaska showed a significant reduction in tobacco use, the state's leading cause of preventable death.

The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) began tracking Alaska smoking numbers in the 1990s. Based on preliminary 2007 BRFSS data, the percentage of adult smokers in Alaska has declined by one-fifth since 1996 to 21.5 percent, a statistically significant decrease. This represents more than 27,000 fewer smokers and is expected to result in almost 8,000 fewer tobacco-related deaths and \$300 million in averted medical costs within that population.

"The numbers reflect the success of our sustained comprehensive tobacco prevention program," said Dr. Jay Butler, Alaska's Chief Medical Officer. "Alaska is effectively investing in programs to save lives and reduce health care costs."

Butler also recognized the contributions of the State Tobacco Prevention and Control Program, the Alaska Tobacco Control Alliance, local tobacco prevention and control coalitions, nonprofit and Native partners, schools, Governor Sarah Palin, legislators and local governments who have supported tobacco use prevention efforts.

Governor Sarah Palin proposed and the Legislature approved an additional \$1 million for the program during the last legislative session.

The data indicate that smoking is on the decline among adults in most age groups and regions of the state. While smoking rates are still high among Alaska Native adults, they have dropped significantly among Alaska Native youth.

— more —

“Overall these numbers are very encouraging,” said Erin Peterson with the department’s tobacco control program. “We still have high smoking rates among some populations and a lot of work remains to be done, but we’re excited about the progress that’s being made.”

The comprehensive tobacco program includes a free tobacco Quit Line for all Alaskans (1-888-842-QUIT). The service includes individualized quit plans, personal quit coaches, and nicotine replacement therapy. Thousands of Alaskans have called the Quit Line since it was established in 2002. Forty percent of those using the service have successfully quit using tobacco.

For more information on the Quit Line program go to: <http://www.alaskatca.org/quitline.htm>.

For more information on the department’s tobacco control program go to:
<http://www.hss.state.ak.us/dph/chronic/tobacco/default.htm>.

For more information on BRFSS go to:
<http://www.hss.state.ak.us/dph/chronic/hsl/brfss/default.htm>

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