

The Nicotine Challenger

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This issue: New Jersey—A State of Success

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A View From The Director

About a year ago tobacco control in New Jersey faced an uncertain future due to the budget deficit and potential cuts. Last June the Governor and New Jersey's legislators acted decisively to improve the health for New Jersey's citizens by raising the tax on cigarettes and securing funding for the Comprehensive Tobacco Control Program for years ahead. Unfortunately as this issue goes to press we hear once again that the threat of serious cuts is looming, and so it is appropriate that this issue highlights some recent successes for tobacco control in New Jersey.

Thankfully, there have been many other successes for tobacco control over the past year. Nationally smoking prevalence appears to be falling in both adults and youth. Part of this decline may be due to increases in price, but much of it is also due to the influence of comprehensive programs such as the one in New Jersey. One of the most notable successes here has been the marked decline in youth tobacco use. From 1999 to 2001 there was a 38% decline in the proportion of middle school students using tobacco, and a 14% decline in the proportion of high school students using tobacco in New Jersey. Interestingly, these reductions are larger than the national trend. Given that over a third of NJ youth have heard of REBEL, over a half have been exposed to the "Tell Big Tobacco, We're Not For Sale" media messages, and fewer retailers are selling to youth, it seems likely that New Jersey's Comprehensive Program is starting to have the desired effects. It is good to see such positive results early on, although one would expect it to take a few more years to see consistent

reductions in adult smoking.

The media component of New Jersey's program received national recognition and is to be congratulated for the many awards received in the past year. Closer to home, we are pleased that our own Tobacco Dependence Clinic saw its 600th patient—a sign that more and more New Jerseyans are seeking help to stop smoking. Additionally, we were also very pleased that almost 200 health professionals attended our recent annual conference (including those from New York, Pennsylvania, Minnesota and Massachusetts). It was particularly good to hear the voices of thanks from New Jersey citizens who had succeeded in stopping smoking with the help of New Jersey's treatment services, including NJ Quicenters, NJ Quitline, and NJ Quitnet, as well as New Jersey's tobacco-free residential addictions treatment services.

I'm writing this message just before the Thanksgiving break, and so I'd like to give one particular message of thanks to Diane Lindberg. Diane has been the administrator of the Tobacco Dependence Program since its inception and had been a strong supporter of tobacco control for years prior to that. This past year she made a remarkable recovery from a serious health concern and also helped our program adjust to the loss of John Slade. After years of excellent work, Diane decided to take early retirement and spend more time with her family in Michigan. We wish her well and are grateful for the tremendous influence she has had on the Tobacco Dependence Program.

Warm regards,
Jonathan Foulds, PhD



CHAMPION VS. TOBACCO LARRY DOWNS

by Bernice Order-Connors

Larry Downs is the Project Director of New Jersey Breathes, a coalition of agencies that works to address tobacco through advocating for the development of statewide policies. Mr. Downs has been with New Jersey Breathes since its inception. "I got involved in tobacco control as an undergraduate public health student in the early 90's at Richard Stockton College when a professor showed a taped interview of tobacco industry executives in the 70's and 80's talking about the scientific basis of lung cancer and cigarettes. The executives were discussing the link between lung cancer and mites in pet birds. These executives were addressing the lay public and coming across as credible. I saw the irony and injustice of their lies. I pursued an internship at the American Cancer Society as part of the COMMIT trial and

Project ASSIST in the early 90's and became immersed in the work. I also grew up trying to get both of my parents to quit smoking. My parents were a product of the 40's and 50's when the AMA was touting cigarettes."

In 1994, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation funded Project ASSIST, in which nine states were chosen to develop statewide coalitions to work on developing and advocating for policies to address the problems of tobacco. With the Medical Society of NJ as the lead agency, a coalition was formed which included the American Cancer Society, American Heart Association, American Lung Association and NJ GASP. The coalition became NJ Breathes, part of the Smokeless States tobacco control policy initiative, which now includes more than 50 member organizations.

continued on page 2

“The greatest challenge in NJ is developing and legislating comprehensive smokefree air policies,” Larry said. “Other states, like California and Delaware, have had real success with this issue and New York City is about to implement a comprehensive smoke-free policy.”

One area where Larry Downs and NJ Breathes have made a real impact is in the tobacco tax increases passed in NJ. “We’ve advocated for and seen several tobacco tax increases. In an organization of so many groups, all with differing agendas and policies, the greatest accomplishment is how we work so well together as a coalition.”

When asked what the community can do to support tobacco control in NJ, Larry said, “We need to take a lesson from Massachusetts and California where cutting edge, successful, comprehensive tobacco control programs have had funding drastically cut. People in community and state tobacco control groups need to boast about the success of their work at town councils and Board of Freeholders meetings. We need to be our own salespeople and connect the people who are benefiting from the NJ Comprehensive Tobacco Control Program to our electorate.”

Larry shared his vision for the future of tobacco control in NJ: “I see a need for a strong private sector advocacy effort to keep our programs out there to make a difference.” Compared to the long history of the tobacco industry in New Jersey, the CTCP effort is very new.

“We need increased aggressive, informative public service messages to include ETS and smokefree air information,” he said. “Just as NYC is moving toward comprehensive smokefree air policy, NJ needs to move in a similar direction and we can do that by getting accurate information out to the public through community efforts and the media.”



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