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## N.C. Public Health receives funds for worksite wellness and tobacco cessation

**RALEIGH** – Gov. Bev Perdue today announced the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has awarded \$5.4 million to North Carolina to support public health efforts to reduce obesity, increase physical activity, improve nutrition, and decrease smoking — the four most important actions for combating chronic diseases and promoting health.

Making North Carolina a healthier state is a priority for Gov. Bev Perdue, in terms of both quality of life and from a statewide economic standpoint.

“Having healthy, well-educated people will lower health care costs, increase productivity, and provide the best workforce in the country,” said Gov. Perdue. “All of those things are the best incentives to attract new and relocating businesses to North Carolina,” Perdue said.

The award to North Carolina is part of \$119.5 million going to the states as the first of several initiatives that make up the comprehensive prevention and wellness initiative, Communities Putting Prevention to Work, which is funded under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

North Carolina will be allotted \$3.8 million over two years to reduce and prevent obesity across the state by improving opportunities for physical activity and access to healthy foods. Another \$1.6 million is to be used for the N.C. Quitline telephone service, tobacco use prevention, and other programs to help people quit tobacco.

A focus of the funding is creating sustainable changes in work and community environments to support healthy lifestyles. North Carolina’s efforts will involve many public and private partners at the state and local levels. A statewide worksite wellness initiative will encourage employers to make sustainable changes, such as establishing employee wellness policies to support healthy behaviors. Wellness experts from the public and private sectors will be part of a statewide Worksite Wellness Collaborative that promotes best practices and supports North Carolina employers in implementing comprehensive wellness programs.

The grants couldn’t have come at a more critical time. In North Carolina, more than half of all deaths occur earlier than expected. Many of these premature deaths are related to chronic diseases that can be prevented or managed through physical activity, healthy eating, and avoiding tobacco use and exposure.

Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death in North Carolina. An estimated 13,000 North Carolinians ages 35 years or older die each year from smoking-related causes. Poor nutrition and lack of adequate physical activity comprise the second leading preventable cause of death in the state. Two-thirds of North Carolina adults and one-third of our children are overweight or obese, putting them at increased risk of illness and death from coronary heart disease, type II diabetes, stroke, and several forms of cancer.

“Poor eating habits and inactive lifestyles are at the root of so many of our health issues, including high blood pressure, diabetes, cancer – even arthritis and injuries,” said State Health Director Jeff Engel, MD. “These problems are largely preventable. We as a state must make it easier for people to eat smart and move more. The ARRA grants will allow North Carolina to continue its momentum in addressing tobacco use, exposure to secondhand smoke, and reducing obesity.”

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