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**Montana Children Would Benefit from President’s Plan to Expand Early Education**

**With Tobacco Tax Increase, New Report Shows**

**WASHINGTON, DC –** President Obama has proposed to expand early childhood education and fund it with an increase in federal tobacco taxes. In Montana, this initiative would provide 1,528 more children from low- and moderate-income families with access to high-quality preschool in the first year alone and prevent 5,300 kids from becoming addicted smokers, according to a report released today by nine organizations that focus on early learning and/or public health.

Additional Montana benefits include:

* Additional funds provided for preschool in the first year: $12.5 million
* Residents saved from premature, smoking-caused deaths: 3,100

In his fiscal year 2014 budget, President Obama proposed to expand federal funding for early education programs, paid for with a 94-cent per pack increase in the federal cigarette tax and a proportional increase in the federal tax on other tobacco products. “Taken together, these two measures would help ensure a future of smart, healthy kids nationwide and in every state,” the report concludes.

The report can be found at [www.smarthealthykids.org](http://www.smarthealthykids.org). It details the educational and health benefits of the President’s proposal nationwide and in every state.

Nationwide, the President’s proposal would ensure that two million children in low- and moderate-income families have access to high-quality preschool and prevent 1.7 million kids from becoming addicted smokers.

“Too many Montana children do not have access to good early learning opportunities and adequate nutrition. As a result, they are unprepared for school and ultimately for life” explains Kelly Rosenleaf, representing Missoula-based the ChildCare Resource. “This is an economic problem for all of us. We can and should do better.”

“Preschool programs are a critical community cornerstone in ensuring that children do well in school while parents are able to work.  When we make preschool programs more accessible, we’re investing in our community’s future, our economy, education, and overall sense of wellbeing” adds Jason Shearer, spokesperson for the Missoula Family YMCA.

Kristin Page-Nei with the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network closes by stating, “The problem is huge, but we also know how to solve it. The most effective step we can take to reduce smoking is to raise the price of cigarettes through tobacco tax increases. It’s pretty simple: when tobacco prices go up, tobacco use goes down. Fewer kids start smoking, and more smokers are motivated to quit.”

Organizations releasing the report are the National Women’s Law Center, Save the Children, MomsRising, Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, American Heart Association, American Lung Association and American Academy of Pediatrics.

**Background**

The President’s proposal would address two major challenges facing America’s children: Too few have access to high-quality preschool programs, while too many still smoke.

Less than half of four-year-olds are currently enrolled in public preschool programs, and many of these programs are not high quality. Numerous studies show that children who have a high-quality preschool experience perform better on cognitive tests in elementary and secondary school, are more likely to graduate from high school, go to college, be employed and be in good health, and are less likely to become involved with crime or have to rely on public assistance.

The proposed increase in tobacco taxes would significantly reduce smoking and other tobacco use, which is the nation’s leading preventable cause of death. Tobacco use kills more than 400,000 Americans every year and costs the nation $96 billion in health care bills. Every day, more than 3,500 U.S. youth try their first cigarette.

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