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Opinion: Make supporting tobacco prevention a New Year's resolution

IN A RECENT national report, New Jersey earned the dubious honor of being in last place among all the U.S. states in spending on tobacco prevention and control. Although New Jersey, like most states, has seen declines in adult and youth smoking rates over the past two decades, tobacco use still remains the No. 1 killer in the country.

The evidence is clear that when states spend money on tobacco control and prevention, it works. It has been estimated that every state dollar spent on tobacco control yields a \$5 return on investment. A recent report of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, however, highlights strong evidence from several states, such as California, Minnesota and Florida, which had historically invested heavily and quite successfully in tobacco control, that reducing or cutting those investments has resulted in rising rates of both tobacco sales to youth and self-reported youth smoking.

In short, state investment in tobacco prevention and control works, that is, until states let up the pressure, and the tobacco industry steps in to fill the void and recruit a new generation of smokers.

The industry's latest tool is the sexy marketing of e-cigarettes, a new vehicle for addiction. Originally sold as devices to help addicted smokers quit, e-cigs are now being marketed to young people, who see them as a safe way to reap the social benefits of cool. E-cigarettes are essentially a nicotine delivery system, but because they do not contain tobacco, they are not subject to the same advertising restrictions as other tobacco products.

In 2010, New Jersey was a groundbreaker in passing the first state law to prohibit the use of electronic smoking devices wherever cigarette smoking is banned. Other states, and recently New York City, have begun to follow suit, passing restrictions on both the use of e-cigs in public spaces and the sale of e-cigs to minors. These efforts recognize what the tobacco industry has already begun to capitalize on: the attraction of e-cigs to youth.

The e-cigarette "vapor" wraps addiction in a new haze of misinformation and attraction that young people need to navigate. In fact, annual national surveys of youth demonstrate that e-cigarette experimentation is already on the rise among middle and high school students, with an estimated 1.78 million students in 2012 reporting that they had used e-cigarettes.

School and community programs can equip young people with the skills to deconstruct media messages, to resist pressures to use tobacco and nicotine in any of its forms, and to understand the short-term and long-term risks of both tobacco and nicotine. State dollars in New Jersey and elsewhere have historically supported such critical school and community-based prevention programs, as well as other efforts to assist smokers who

want to quit, hard-hitting media campaigns and enforcement of laws that prohibit tobacco sales to minors. These important efforts must continue, particularly in light of the latest trends in selling addiction.

Yet, in 2013, the American Lung Association gave New Jersey a grade of F for state funding of tobacco prevention and control, and the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids ranked the state dead last in tobacco prevention spending among all U.S. states, with a total annual expenditure of zero projected for 2014.

The annual health care cost of smoking in New Jersey is far from trivial — \$3.17 billion, of which \$967 million is covered by the state's Medicaid program. Tobacco control and prevention have a huge return on investment. Like the many New Jersey residents who choose to quit smoking for their New Year's resolution, New Jersey should retain its cutting edge in tobacco control by making prevention its 2014 resolution.

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