

TESTIMONY SUPPORT OF SB2024 - Support for funding BreatheND

January 11, 2017

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Chairman Holmberg and members of the Senate Appropriations Committee:

I'm here today to roll up my sleeves and talk results with you. As a doctor and a person who is passionate and dedicated about improving the health of our communities, results matter to me. And they should matter to you, because these aren't just numbers. These are your family members, your neighbors, your friends, and this is your wallet. To have a serious discussion about reducing health care costs must include this.

BreatheND is focused on results. From the beginning, this program has carried out smart and effective efforts to drive successful tobacco prevention and improve health. For example, North Dakota passed a Smoke-Free Law in 2012. BreatheND laid the groundwork for this law by preparing and assisting local communities to put policies in place. And then they followed through after the vote by helping every community comply with the law, which passed in every legislative district.

Prior to the state law, Grand Forks passed a smoke free city ordinance.

Smoking and secondhand smoke affects the heart and blood vessels, increasing the risk of heart attacks in both smokers, and non-smokers. Just four months after the Smoke-Free ordinance was implemented, we found the rate of heart attacks a North Dakota hospital treated decreased by 24.1%. That's a quarter fewer heart attacks compared to 4 months before the law was passed. And that's just one hospital. Not only were families spared the emotionally taxing experience of dealing with a loved one hospitalized for a heart attack, they were also spared the bill. That reduction amounts to a cost savings of more than \$150,000 in that four month period. Those results matter and were published in a leading tobacco related disease research journal.

This is what BreatheND is so good at: identifying the methods that will make the greatest impact and thoroughly executing them. This is known as best practices- those that have the science behind them.

In my career, I have treated both young people and adults suffering from severe illnesses and health conditions caused by tobacco. The pain and suffering I've seen nicotine-addicted users put themselves and their families through is needless. One case at a time, I can and do work to get people healthier.

But, I also see the big picture, and that's this: tobacco is still the leading cause of preventable death and disease in the state. "Preventable" is the key word. This public health crisis can be ended as long as we are vigilant about our prevention efforts. Attacking the program that turns out the most significant tobacco prevention results North Dakota has ever seen is not how we beat tobacco.

Today, I'm urging support for BreatheND, an agency solely focused on tobacco prevention and cessation. We can rely on BreatheND to prevent kids from using tobacco and urge users to quit.