

**TESTIMONY SUPPORT TO KEEP THE CENTER/BREATHEND FUNDED  
AMEND SB2024**

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**Chairman Pollert and members of the House Appropriations Human Resources Division:**

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. My fellow Governor appointed Executive and Advisory Committee members have always been excited to see the science at work for every day North Dakotans.

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.

BreatheND has been on the path of best practices from its beginnings. As a physician, I am interested in quality interventions that matter, and that includes strong policy pieces that translate to better health for all. Treating tobacco addiction is an important component in public health policy, but

among the scientific community, we know prevention is critical. I have been so fortunate to be associated with successful health policy here in North Dakota. My clinic practice has been focused on chronic disease processes and how they affect patients for nearly 25 years; In addition to BreatheND, I serve on national committees with the American Medical Association and the American Diabetes Association that also create best practices for education and prevention in the areas of chronic disease. I have a good working knowledge of how to address “the big picture”. BreatheND has been the engine for creating an environment where chronic disease prevention actually exists, specifically related to tobacco.

The normalization of smoking into our society after decades of successful marketing by tobacco companies has collectively lulled us to sleep, allowing us, at times, to deny the truly horrific scope of death and disability inflicted by these products.

I can't tell you how you should vote on BreatheND's funding. I can tell you that BreatheND has been the home to sound scientific practices in the world of tobacco prevention and control for North Dakota that can influence the rates of tobacco death and disability for our state.