

# Minutes



**Tuesday, June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2018**  
**8:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.**

**Present:** Haley Thorson, Kailee Dvorak, Sarah Odegard, Jodi Ramberg (UND), Leanne Kilzer (Altru), Denae Grove (GFAFB), Michelle Earl (Altru), Nicole Brien (Altru); Marisa Mango (VCHC Intern); Debbie Swanson, Theresa Knox, Keith Westerfield, Heather Austin (TFND).

## **Welcome and Introductions**

Haley welcomed all, introductions were made. Haley introduced guest, Heather Austin

## **Update from Tobacco Free North Dakota Executive Director, Heather Austin**

Heather talked about policy initiatives that Tobacco-Free ND will be working on during the legislative session, with the biggest one being the tobacco tax. She is cautiously optimistic that they may be able to increase tax by legislation vs initiated measure.

Raising the tobacco tax is the most effective way to reduce tobacco use rates, especially in youth populations. We are ranked 48th nationally for lowest tax rate at 44 cents per pack, which was last raised in 1993. Federal tax rate was raised to a dollar in 2009 (with the last rate before that of only one cent!). Everyone else has raised their price of tobacco: tobacco industry, wholesalers, and retailers; except for the state. The cost of everything associated with tobacco has also gone up, and with ND's tobacco tax being stagnant, the state is actually losing money. It costs every household \$768 in tobacco-related costs, whether there is a smoker in house or not. The proposed tobacco tax increase of \$1.50 for cigarettes would provide \$100 million per biennium for the state. They would recommend that money be used for health programs and services, but would leave it to legislators to decide. They will also look to address e-cigarettes in legislature since it is currently not classified as a tobacco product (tax-wise), but this may be a big win because everyone in the legislature is interested in what is happening to our kids with these products. The NDDoH has reached out to other states that have already passed legislation to see how they did it, and their best practices.

Another subject of discussion is Tobacco 21 (T21)—increasing the minimum age from 18 to 21 to purchase tobacco products. 90% of smokers start before they are 18 years of age. Although Tobacco-Free ND is not pushing it this session, they are preparing responses in case it comes up. Data is starting to come in from the five states (CA, HI, OR, ME, and NJ, with IL considering) that have already risen the age to 21 to purchase tobacco products. Minneapolis just passed a Tobacco 21 ordinance last week!

ND is last state standing without a tax stamp (packs of cigarettes would be stamped showing that the pack had been taxed at the ND rate.). ND used to do it, but stopped due to cost-prohibited technology. In 2005 it was estimated it would cost \$500,000 to renew stamping tobacco

The proposed tobacco tax would not apply to the native tribes if passed, although Tobacco-Free ND are reaching out to Tribal Councils, proposing they enact a similar tax increase of their own at the same time. This could increase funding for their health programs.

TFND has reached out to the governor's office and was able to sit down with his staff and provided them with an outline of all the information of the tobacco tax talking points, and why it is so important. They have not heard a reply back yet as to whether the governor plans to be supportive or not. Outreach has been done with the governor's first lady, who formed a committee that is supportive of their work.

The tobacco industry may try to introduce their own industry-sponsored bill to get a smaller tobacco tax approved instead (then they could just discount or offer coupons for tobacco to off-set the price increase.). This is why it is important to educate law makers.

The out-of-pocket costs of a tax increase may affect those with lower income, but the cost of health care would be more detrimental to them if they get sick from tobacco use. Price increase actually has been proven to help them quit tobacco. However, NDQuits is still free, and is one of the best Quit Lines in the nation.

Tobacco-Free ND membership is still on-going, so join or renew now! You can then receive their weekly updates on tobacco issues.

### **Member Sharing**

No member updates

### **Next Meeting—7.10.18**

### **Upcoming Events:**

- Dakota Conference on Rural and Public Health – Alerus Center, June 13th-15<sup>th</sup>
- Tobacco Prevention Coordinator Quarterly Training via webinar, July 24th

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**The Grand Forks Tobacco Free Coalition is a group of citizens working together to create and promote a healthier, tobacco-free community through education, legislation, and enforcement of policies.**