



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Prevent20 coalition calls for high tobacco taxes to prevent cancer, protect health and the environment, and reduce poverty

Coalition of cancer organizations says policy supports health, the environment and development

(May 31st, 2017, Atlanta, USA) – On World No Tobacco Day, the Prevent20 global coalition of cancer organizations calls on governments around the world to increase taxes on tobacco as a key strategy for cancer prevention and more broadly to support health, the environment and development. In 2016, the global economic cost of smoking-related diseases including cancer (from health expenditures and productivity losses) was USD \$1.4 trillion, with 40 percent of this cost occurring in low and middle income countries.

Effective diagnosis, treatment and support for cancer patients are critical, but it's also essential to prevent cancer. Globally, 20 percent of all cancer deaths are related to tobacco use. Social disadvantage and low socio-economic status increase the likelihood of smoking; as this trend continues, tobacco-related cancers will disproportionately affect the poor. High tobacco taxes and prices are proven to be the single most effective and cost-efficient measure for reducing tobacco use, so represent an effective way of reducing preventable, tobacco-related cancer - but are the least well utilized way of reducing tobacco use.

The World Health Organization (WHO) target of reducing smoking prevalence by 30% by 2025 would result in at least 173 million fewer smokers by 2025 and at least 38 million fewer deaths. Health economists from The American Cancer Society have calculated that world average cigarette prices will need to quadruple by 2025 to deliver WHO's target reduction in smoking prevalence. In fact, it will require an average 7-fold excise tax increase. A side benefit will be an increase in global tobacco tax revenue, to an estimated 0.8 trillion international dollars annually. These funds could contribute towards improvements in health

systems and health care – including cancer care – and other development priorities.

Tobacco harms development

In low and middle income countries, estimates show that as much as 10 percent of the income of a household where a smoker lives can be spent on tobacco products. Making tobacco less affordable is particularly important for the most vulnerable in society, who are more likely to use tobacco and may be unable to seek a diagnosis and treatment until it's too late – a potentially deadly combination. When people are deterred from using tobacco, they can spend more on critical expenditures like food, education, housing, clothing and healthcare instead. This can help vulnerable people break out of generational cycles of poor health and poverty, clearly benefiting the economy as well as the individual.

Members of Prevent20 voice calls to action

Gary M. Reedy, CEO of American Cancer Society commented: “Organizations like ACS are dedicated to eliminating cancer as a major health problem. With so much still unknown about this devastating and widespread disease, it’s imperative that we use every bit of knowledge and every proven cancer-fighting strategy to its full potential. We know that tobacco use contributes to 1.5 million people dying from a tobacco-related cancer worldwide each year. Twenty percent of all cancer deaths could be prevented if people didn’t use tobacco products. We also know that increasing tobacco taxes is the single most effective tobacco control intervention to help reduce tobacco consumption and prevent potential new users from starting. It’s our responsibility to act on this information to save lives. We stand ready to help our fellow members of Prevent20 around the world fight for instituting higher tobacco taxes.”

Dr. Carlos Castro Medical and Scientific Director of Liga Colombiana Contra El Cáncer (Colombian League Against Cancer) continued: “No health system and national economy can afford the growing burden of cancer, so it’s essential to prevent cancer where possible. As tobacco is a leading cause of preventable cancer, every country should implement high taxes to reduce tobacco use. In our discussions with policymakers, we found they were very receptive to the fact that the funds raised could be used to fund Colombia’s development priorities in addition to improving health – a clear win-win. We will continue to advocate for higher tobacco taxes as our country’s economy grows and recommend all cancer organizations do the same.”

In some countries, initial benefits can be delivered by increasing tobacco taxes on specific tobacco products that currently are taxed at a much lower rate than other tobacco products. **Professor Dr. Golam Mohiuddin Faruque, Joint Secretary of Bangladesh Cancer Society** said: “We’ve celebrated World No Tobacco Day every year since our inception in 1978, but this year I am hopeful that we can make real progress in the fight against tobacco-related cancer, and the suffering and poverty it causes, if our government decides to raise tobacco taxes, particularly on the lower-taxed tobacco products that represent 80 percent of tobacco consumption. Very low taxes and prices are sustaining tobacco use among the most vulnerable in our society - this is a clear risk to health and development in Bangladesh.”

Paul Ebusu, Executive Director of Uganda Cancer Society stated: “Uganda Cancer Society has a proud history of working to reduce the cancer burden in Uganda, but only recently started to advocate for high tobacco taxes and the enforcement of our strong Tobacco Control Law. WHO estimates that tobacco kills more than 13,000 people in Uganda every year. There are financial losses, too. A study carried out for the period 2013/2014 indicates that the government of Uganda received 211.15 billion Ugandan shillings from tobacco taxes, but spent 328.82 billion Ugandan shillings on treating tobacco-related illnesses, creating a net loss of 117.66 billion shillings. The tobacco industry has its sights set on countries across Africa. If it succeeds, the health of our people and our country’s

development will be harmed. We see higher tobacco taxes as a clear opportunity to prevent current and future disease and death and economic cost, and strongly recommend government to implement a tobacco tax policy in Uganda.”

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Notes to Editors

Prevent 20

Prevent20 is a global coalition of cancer organizations, calling for tobacco taxes to be increased in every country to reduce tobacco use and tobacco-related cancer deaths, which currently account for 20 percent of all global cancer deaths. Members join to provide and to benefit from the coalition’s combined knowledge and expertise, so any cancer organization can become a successful advocate for this important health policy. Tobacco is a risk factor for a wide range of cancers, so every cancer organization is encouraged to join the coalition, irrespective of their current level of involvement or knowledge of this issue. Cancer organizations can find out more and join the coalition at wecanprevent20.org.

To find out more, please visit wecanprevent20.org or Twitter [@wecanprevent20](https://twitter.com/wecanprevent20)

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