

City of Milwaukee Tobacco-Free Alliance: Milwaukee Pride says 'no thanks' to tobacco funding

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Milwaukee—Twenty LGBTQ and allied health organizations are applauding Milwaukee Pride for saying “no thanks” to Big Tobacco funding for this year’s PrideFest celebration. This big step forward builds on the Milwaukee Pride board’s decision last year to provide several tobacco-free spaces to promote the health of all PrideFest attendees.

“The past several festival seasons have been ones full of progress, change and advancement. We’re proud to make a commitment to respectfully declining Big Tobacco sponsorship and support in an effort to continually educate and engage people about the health risks associated with smoking. We understand and respect the individual’s right to make decisions on their own, however, we are fully committed to supporting our community partner’s efforts in reducing cigarette use across the board. We’re excited about the increased community activation and support for promoting positive health messaging and resources for those who need them,” said Wes Shaver, President, Milwaukee Pride Board of Directors.

“Milwaukee Pride’s decision to decline tobacco money is a big win for LGBTQ health,” said Gerry Coon, President and CEO of Diverse and Resilient, which is the recipient of PrideFest’s Plus One campaign this year. “Especially the health of LGBTQ youth. Milwaukee Pride is to be applauded for putting the health of Pride-goers first.”

In the past, Milwaukee Pride has received sponsorship funding from a promotional

agency on behalf of a tobacco company and in exchange allowed them to promote menthol cigarettes and offer coupons to attendees to purchase their products at a deep discount.

No more. Twenty organizations invested in the health and well-being of LGBTQ individuals sent a letter to the Milwaukee Pride board asking them to say “no thanks” to Big Tobacco. Although the organizations understand that Big Tobacco money helped to offset the costs of organizing PrideFest, they were alarmed by the promotion of menthol cigarettes at this annual celebration of the LGBTQ community’s vibrancy. After all, LGBTQ individuals smoke at almost twice the rate of the general population, and menthol tobacco products are more addictive, more dangerous, and harder to quit than non-flavored cigarettes. The higher smoking rate is in part due to the tobacco industry targeting the LGBTQ community and people of color to encourage them to smoke and become addicted to their products—with devastating health consequences.

“Big Tobacco is not a friend to LGBTQ individuals and people of color,” said Lorraine Lathen of the Wisconsin African American Tobacco Prevention Network. “By reducing the availability of inexpensive tobacco products at PrideFest, its organizers are helping to establish the next generation of tobacco-free youth and making it easier for long-time smokers to quit with the support of their peers.”

To show their support for Milwaukee Pride’s decision to say “no thanks” to tobacco funding, nine different community groups—including Medical College of Wisconsin Cancer Center, Froedtert Hospital, AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin, Diverse and Resilient, City of Milwaukee Tobacco-Free Alliance, Wisconsin African American Tobacco Prevention Network, Wisconsin Tobacco Prevention and Poverty Network, Pathfinders, and UMOS—have contributed a total of \$11,000 to offset the tobacco money the festival is losing and will be recognized as sponsors.

“Milwaukee Pride’s decision shows that the LGBTQ community can survive—and thrive—without tobacco,” said Anneke Mohr, City of Milwaukee Tobacco-Free Alliance Coordinator.

To learn more about the City of Milwaukee Tobacco-Free Alliance contact Anneke Mohr at amohr@communityadvocates.net or 414-270-2948.