American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network: Wisconsin lags on tobacco control, cancer-fighting public policies

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Report offers closer look at efforts to raise tobacco sale age to 21

MADSION, Wis. – Wisconsin continues to fall short when it comes to passing legislation that prevents and reduces suffering and death from cancer. According to the latest edition of How Do You Measure Up?: A Progress Report on State Legislative Activity to Reduce Cancer Incidence and Mortality, Wisconsin still lags behind on tobacco control policies. The American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network released the report today.

The 17th edition of the report assesses tobacco control within four issue areas. Wisconsin only met benchmarks in two categories: cigarette tax rates and smoke-free air laws.

This year's report also includes a special section examining efforts to stem youth tobacco use by raising the legal age of sale for tobacco to 21. In statehouses across the country, policymakers have prioritized efforts to keep tobacco products out of the hands of kids, introducing 88 bills that raised the age of sale for tobacco

products. But state lawmakers' good-faith efforts have been co-opted by the tobacco industry, who want to use these laws to advance policies that will interfere with effective tobacco control and protect their profits. In fact, 51 out of the 88 age of sale bills introduced in 2019 included provisions that advance tobacco industry interests. The special section draws attention to Big Tobacco's agenda and outlines the principles that make tobacco 21 policies effective.

"States' tobacco 21 efforts have shown us that the devil's in the details, and it's important to consider each piece of legislation carefully," said Sara Sahli, Wisconsin government relations director for ACS CAN. "For Wisconsin, any future tobacco 21 bill must be part of a comprehensive, evidence-based strategy that includes policies like adequately funded tobacco cessation and prevention programs. The last thing we want to do is pass a public health bill that ends up benefiting the very enemy we're trying to defeat."

How Do You Measure Up? rates states in eight specific areas of public policy that can help fight cancer. A color-coded system classifies how well a state is doing in each issue. Green shows that a state has adopted evidence-based policies and best practices; yellow indicates moderate movement toward the benchmark; and red shows where states are falling short.

How Wisconsin Measures Up:

Increased Access to Medicaid Red
Access to Palliative Care Red
Pain Policy Yellow
Cigarette Tax Rates Green
Smoke-free Laws Green
Tobacco Prevention and Cessation Program Funding Red
Medicaid Coverage of Tobacco Cessation Services Yellow
Indoor Tanning Red

"This year, 34,220 people in Wisconsin will be diagnosed with cancer," Sahli said. "We owe it to them – and to everyone at risk of developing this disease – to do everything in our power to prevent cancer and improve access to screenings and treatment. This report provides lawmakers a legislative path forward."

To view the complete report and details on Wisconsin's ratings, visit www.fightcancer.org/measure.

The American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN) is making cancer a top priority for public officials and candidates at the federal, state and local levels. ACS CAN empowers advocates across the country to make their voices heard and influence evidence-based public policy change as well as legislative and regulatory solutions that will reduce the cancer burden. As the American Cancer Society's nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy affiliate, ACS CAN is critical to the fight for a world without cancer. For more information, visit www.fightcancer.org.