



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Maine Cancer Foundation Invests in Major Youth Tobacco Prevention Campaign
Joins Maine CDC Effort to Counter Messaging from Big Tobacco

FALMOUTH, Maine – The Maine Cancer Foundation (MCF) has awarded grant funding of \$750,000 to support a three-year statewide Youth Tobacco Prevention Campaign targeting Maine youth, their parents, and known influencers. The campaign will utilize tactical digital media placement and disruptive messaging to counteract the impact of the more than \$43 million invested in Maine annually by tobacco companies targeting the youth audience.

The new campaign will address the fact Maine has higher than average youth smoking rates, with the ultimate goal of driving the youth smoking rate in Maine to zero. Working alongside the Tobacco and Substance Use Prevention Program of the Maine Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, MCF is committing significant resources to combat pervasive and subtle youth-oriented tobacco marketing, including new tobacco-delivery products continually being developed to lure in youth.

One in ten Maine residents age 18 and under smoke combustible tobacco, and another 17% say they regularly use electronic cigarettes. Almost half of all Maine high school students report experimenting with smoking. For Maine middle schoolers, more than 27 percent have a best friend or parent who smokes and state that they can access tobacco whenever they want. A combination of tough laws governing tobacco access such as the recently passed Tobacco 21 Law, community education and support, and youth prevention efforts like this are needed to reduce Maine's smoking rates and consequently, Maine's cancer rates.

Because youth are highly engaged and influenced by digital media tactics, the Maine Youth Tobacco Prevention Campaign will deploy mass-reach health communication interventions as powerful tools for preventing the initiation of tobacco use, promoting and facilitating cessation, and shaping social norms related to tobacco use. The campaign will utilize evidence-based tactics to target youth where they spend time digitally, and to intercept where tobacco companies have already found and engaged them.

“Maine Cancer Foundation is determined to reduce cancer rates 20 percent by 2020, and we know that the single best way to move us toward this goal is to reduce and ultimately eliminate tobacco use. By partnering with the Maine CDC's experienced tobacco prevention experts, we intend to fight back against the relentless marketing of tobacco to our youth,” says MCF's Director of Programming, Aysha Sheikh. “We want our young people to understand that they are the target for Big Tobacco, and empower them to reject their manipulative tactics.”



It is Maine Cancer Foundation’s mission to reduce cancer incidence and mortality in Maine, and preventing youth tobacco use is a key part of that goal. Smoking is the leading cause of preventable deaths, and is directly linked to more than 50 percent of all cancers in Maine. While tobacco companies deny targeting youth directly, they know that 90 percent of smokers start before they are 18 years old and 99 percent will start before age 26. Using innovation and sneaky tactics, they strategically seek to gain replacement smokers as older people quit or die.

“Maine has a significantly higher smoking rate than the national average, and not coincidentally, higher than average cancer rates. We are committing a significant investment in protecting our young people from the harmful impact of tobacco in the hopes of changing this story,” asserts Tara Hill, Executive Director of MCF.

“When the State invested more in anti-tobacco messaging, we saw concrete evidence that our smoking rates went down. As state funds have decreased, we have seen those rates go back up and we have a mandate to intervene. We are proud to allocate close to a million dollars to influence the decisions of kids and their parents, and loosen the grip of tobacco on Maine.”

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About Maine Cancer Foundation:

Maine Cancer Foundation is dedicated to reducing cancer incidence and mortality rates in Maine. 100% of funds raised by the Foundation are used to benefit the people of Maine. We lead a state-wide effort to advance the most promising and effective cancer-fighting efforts available to the people of Maine through a combination of grant-based financial support and coalition building. MCF is in the middle of a 5-year campaign, the Challenge Cancer 2020 initiative, to reduce cancer incidence and mortality in Maine 20 percent by 2020. Learn more at <https://mainecancer.org>