

## TEMPLATE

**Below is a template letter to the editor for your submission to local newspapers. To ensure that your community is represented appropriately, and to avoid duplication, please customize this letter to highlight your local area. Please keep in mind that most newspapers have word limits for letters to the editor, not to exceed a 200-300 word count. Check with your local paper for specific regulations on this submission.**

**Dear Editor:**

As the Governor and Legislature seek to address North Carolina's budget shortfall, some are proposing to cut funding for tobacco prevention programs that are funded by the Health and Wellness Trust Fund (HWTF). While tough choices must be made to balance the budget, tobacco prevention remains one of the smartest investments North Carolina can make. Comprehensive tobacco prevention and cessation programs prevent kids from smoking, help adult smokers quit, and reduce health care costs associated with tobacco use – the No. 1 preventable cause of death in North Carolina.

Every scientific authority that has studied the issue, including the Institute of Medicine, the CDC and the U.S. Surgeon General, has concluded that when properly funded, implemented and sustained, tobacco prevention programs work. Because of the HWTF and the organizations it funds, there are 53,000 fewer youth smokers, the middle school smoking rate has been cut in half, and the high school smoking rate has been cut by one third, with the result that North Carolina currently has the lowest youth smoking rate in its history. Tobacco programs work, but they must be sustained over time; when states have cut funding for tobacco prevention programs, progress has stalled and even reversed.

Tobacco prevention is a smart investment. It has been estimated that for every \$1 spent by the HWTF in programs and services, \$2.54 was generated in financial benefits. Abolishing a program that has such a high return on investment is unacceptable for financial reasons as well as ethical ones.

The evidence is clear that tobacco prevention funding reduces smoking, saves lives, and saves money. Let your lawmakers know that you care about our state and our children. Support our efforts to keep the Health and Wellness Trust Fund.

# Save the Health and Wellness Trust Fund!

## Letter to the Editor Tool Kit: Youth Edition

The North Carolina General Assembly is currently considering de-funding the NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund (HWTF). The HWTF is one of the major state agencies investing in tobacco prevention, and these cuts would decimate tobacco control in North Carolina. Please use this template to get a letter to the editor published in your local paper on the important of the HWTF.

1. Write your letter.
  - On the next page are two sample letters to the editor. Both include space for you to personalize your story with information about why you care about tobacco control. The more original the better, so feel free to completely write your own letter, or use the current structure and talking points (<http://www.ncallianceforhealth.org/Tobacco-Use-Prevention.aspx>) to adjust the sample letters. Most papers have a maximum word limit of 200 words, so keep that in mind.
2. Find your local paper.
  - We need letters in papers across the state! Check out a print copy of your local paper, or look on-line and there should be instructions on how to submit letters to the editorial board. In print, the editorial page should be a couple pages deep into the cover section, and on-line you should be able to find a link to editorial content which will explain the process.
3. Submit your letter!
  - Be sure to proofread first, and make sure that everything is clear and correct in your letter. Submit your letter on-line so it arrives quickly, and if they ask for a phone number be sure to include one. The first time you submit a letter, you may be contacted by a staff member to verify your information.
4. Your letter is published!
  - Congrats! In a span of a couple days to two weeks, your letter is published. Newspapers cannot always submit every letter they receive, so don't be discouraged if it takes some time to be published. Letters that are written by young people are unique, and almost always printed. Once your letter is printed, let your youth leader and others in tobacco prevention know, and e-mail it to [t-lee.storrow@heart.org](mailto:t-lee.storrow@heart.org), so we can keep a record of printed letters.

Questions? Concerns? Ideas? Want to know how else to get involved? Contact Lee Storrow at the NC Alliance for Health at [t-lee.storrow@heart.org](mailto:t-lee.storrow@heart.org). Thanks for your work!

## LETTER NUMBER ONE

Dear Editor:

As a young person in North Carolina, I'm very concerned about budget cuts that would abolish the TRU movement. The TRU movement is the state wide program which focuses on stopping youth from using tobacco products and is funded by the North Carolina Health and Wellness Trust Fund. Under current state budget proposals, the Health and Wellness Trust Fund would be dissolved and lose all funding next year.

(Insert your story about why you care about tobacco prevention. Example should be approximately 70 words. Examples might include

1. A friend or family member who has had health problem because of tobacco
2. Information about how the industry targets young people
3. Your desire for your peers to live healthy lives.)

Because of the HWTF and the TRU movement, there are 53,000 fewer youth smokers, with the result that North Carolina currently has the lowest youth smoking rate in its history. Our legislators should not stop progress!

Contact Sen. \_\_\_\_\_ and tell him/her to save the Health and Wellness Trust Fund!

## LETTER NUMBER TWO

Dear Editor:

Tobacco kills 32 people a day in North Carolina, yet our state leaders are planning to cut the budget of the NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund! The HWTF runs some of the most effective campaigns to stop teens from smoking, including the very successful TRU Movement. By using eye-catching and awareness raising commercials, and by empowering my peers and I to work for a tobacco-free generation, TRU has decreased youth tobacco consumption, and currently NC has the lowest youth smoking rate in our history.

I got involved in tobacco prevention because... (Example should be approximately 50 words.)

I know our legislators have tough budget decisions to make, but tobacco prevention is a smart investment. It has been estimated that for every \$1 spent by the HWTF in programs and services, \$2.54 was generated in financial benefits. The work of the Health and Wellness Trust Fund saves lives, and saves the state money. Contact your legislator and tell them to save the Health and Wellness Trust Fund!