

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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New Report Finds NC's Teen Smoking Rates Hit Historic Low! *Historically "Tobacco Producing State" on Track to Drop Below National Average*

(CHARLOTTE, NC) – Public health leaders and teen tobacco use prevention advocates praised results from a recent survey that shows high school smoking rates have hit a historic low in North Carolina. The study's data reveals that high school smoking rates have declined by one-third since 1999, and smoking rates among middle schoolers have dropped by two-thirds. These results indicate that North Carolina is on track to drop below the national average.

The NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund (HWTF) announced the results of the 2005 North Carolina Youth Tobacco Survey today at the Carolinas Medical Center in Charlotte. The Youth Tobacco Survey, administered by the NC Tobacco Prevention and Control Branch, is the definitive study of tobacco use among young people in the state.

Since HWTF began funding prevention efforts in 2003, the rate of decline in high school smoking has nearly tripled. Middle school rates have also accelerated downward. The data translates into **27,000 fewer teen smokers since 2003**.

"What this really says to us is that 27,000 more teens are living healthier lives, because they made a choice not to smoke," said Lt. Gov. Bev Perdue, HWTF chair. "The survey demonstrates that our efforts are making a big difference and improving the health of teens. We have to continue our commitment to the programs that will help create the first generation of tobacco-free kids in North Carolina."

More than 6,000 middle and high schools students, from 177 schools within 79 school districts, participated in the survey. The response rate was one of the highest in the nation.

Some of the report's most significant news:

- 27,000 fewer high school and middle school students are current smokers than in 2003.
- Current cigarette smoking among both middle and high school students dropped significantly since 2003. High school from 27.3 percent in 2003 to 20.3 percent in 2005. Middle school from 9.3 percent in 2003 to 5.8 percent in 2005.
- Middle school current cigarette smoking rates in 2005 (5.8 percent) are lower than the national average of 8.4 percent, measured in 2004. From 1999 to 2005, the NC rates have decreased from 15 percent to 5.8 percent.
- From 1999 to 2003, NC had seen only modest improvements. However, from 2003 to 2005 significant changes in current cigarette smoking by both middle and high students occurred. This is important from a statistical standpoint. It means there is less than a 5 percent probability that these changes were the result of random chance.

ABOUT THE NC HEALTH AND WELLNESS TRUST FUND:

The NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund makes North Carolina stronger, both physically and economically, by funding programs that promote preventive health. Created by the General Assembly in 2000 to allocate a portion of North Carolina's share of the national tobacco settlement, HWTF has invested \$127 million to support preventive health initiatives and \$78 million to fund a prescription drug assistance program. For more information, please visit www.HealthWellNC.com.

ABOUT TRU:

Tobacco. Reality. Unfiltered, commonly known as TRU, is North Carolina's first-ever statewide youth tobacco prevention multi-media campaign that uses testimonials of real North Carolina teens as well as hard-hitting facts to dissuade young people from using tobacco. This campaign is part of the NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund's teen tobacco use prevention initiative. Funded at \$28 million from HWTF, this grassroots initiative includes the TRU media campaign, as well as a grant program including 70 grants (50 community-based grants, 4 statewide grants and 16 tobacco free school mini-grants) to a total of 55 organizations. To find out more about TRU, please visit www.realityunfiltered.com.

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