

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 15, 2008

NORTH CAROLINA TEEN SMOKING RATES HIT HISTORIC LOWS

Over 5,000 NC youth have taken pledge to stay tobacco free

(Raleigh, NC) – Public health leaders and teen tobacco use prevention advocates applauded results from the 2007 statewide survey that indicate historic lows in teen smoking in North Carolina. For the first time since youth smoking has been assessed in our state, the majority of teens have never tried smoking, not even a puff.

The NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund (HWTF) announced the results of the 2007 North Carolina Youth Tobacco Survey (NC YTS) today at C.E. Jordan High School in Durham. The Youth Tobacco Survey, administered by the NC Tobacco Prevention and Control Branch, is the definitive study of tobacco use among high school and middle school students in the state.

According to survey results, middle school smoking in North Carolina has dropped to 4.5% and high school smoking has dropped to 19%.

“Our North Carolina teens are making history,” said Lt. Gov. Bev Perdue, HWTF chair. “The declining rates in youth smoking show us that thousands of teens around the state have made a decision to be smoke free. These results push us another step closer to reaching our goal of creating the first tobacco-free generation in North Carolina. In the long run, we’re saving lives.”

From 1999 to 2003, NC had seen only modest improvements in current youth cigarette smoking rates. However, from 2003 to 2007, the time period when HWTF funded its youth prevention and cessation initiative, significant changes in current cigarette smoking occurred among both middle and high school students. Since 2003, middle school smoking dropped by 51.8% and high school smoking dropped by 30.4%. This data translates into 34,000 fewer teen smokers since 2003.

The timing of the announcement of the survey results coincides with another reason to celebrate NC youth’s commitment to staying tobacco free – the fact that HWTF’s youth grassroots recruitment campaign has reached its goal two months ahead of schedule. The Tobacco.Reality.Unfiltered (TRU) recruitment campaign was launched last September by HWTF in Raleigh with an ambitious goal of having, by the end of the current school year, 5,000 NC youth take the pledge to remain tobacco free. Last week the number of TRU pledges reached the 5,000 mark, and hundreds more have signed on since then. The current count can be viewed on HWTF’s home page for the TRU Web site: www.realityunfiltered.com.

Peer influence may be working in a healthier direction since social norms around smoking have definitely shifted among NC youth: 78.9% of middle school students and 51.1% of high school students have never tried smoking – not even a puff. This represents a dramatic change from 1999, when only 60.7% of NC middle school students and 31.8% of NC high school students had never tried smoking.

More than 7,500 middle and high school students from 191 schools and 74 school districts (plus one charter) participated in the survey. The response rate was one of the highest in the nation.

Some of the report’s most significant news:

- 34,000 fewer high school and middle school students are current smokers than in 2003.
- Current smoking rates dropped significantly since 2003, among both middle school and high school students. High school rates dropped from 27.3% in 2003 to 19.0% in 2007, and middle school from 9.3% in 2003 to 4.5% in 2007.

About TRU:

Tobacco. Reality. Unfiltered., commonly known as TRU, uses testimonials of real North Carolina teens as well as hard-hitting facts to dissuade youth from using tobacco. Funded at \$65 million from HWTF, this grassroots initiative includes the TRU media campaign, as well as a grant programs to organizations working in all 100 counties to reduce teen tobacco use. To find out more about TRU, please visit www.realityunfiltered.com.

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 \$143 million to support preventive health initiatives and \$102 million to fund prescription drug assistance programs. For more information, please visit www.HealthWellNC.com.

###