

New Statewide Poll Shows that Oregonians Overwhelmingly Support a Tax on Cigarettes June 1, 2009

In May 2009, the independent public opinion research firm Davis, Hibbitts, Midghall, Inc., conducted a statewide survey of registered voters (N=500) to gauge opinions about a 60-cent increase in the cigarette tax. The survey was commissioned by the Tobacco-Free Coalition of Oregon (TOFCO). A sample of the findings is presented here.

67% of Oregonians support a 60-cent tax on cigarettes:

The 60-cent tax increase was tested in different contexts throughout the survey, each time receiving strong majority support. These results were consistent with findings from previous statewide polls from 2008.

Oregonians believe lowering healthcare costs to be the most powerful reason to increase cigarette taxes:

“Which is a very good / good reason to raise the price of cigarettes?”

Response Category	Very Good / Good
Raising the price can ultimately save the state \$400 million in healthcare costs	77%
Raising the price prevent kids from smoking - fewer deaths from smoking related illness	74%
Making cigarettes more expensive gives smokers a strong incentive to quit	65%

“Which of these are very good or good reasons to prevent smoking and tobacco use in Oregon?”

Response Category	Very Good / Good
Preventing tobacco can help lower the cost of healthcare for everyone	84%
For every dollar spent on prevention programs, we could save about \$5 in health care costs	78%
Smoking related illnesses cost the Oregon Health Plan \$287 million a year	78%
Smoking is a public health hazard / hurts people around smoke; it doesn't just affect smokers	78%

Oregonians support for a tobacco tax remains strong even when discussed in the context of other tax proposals:

62% of Oregonians think a “tobacco tax to prevent smoking among kids and help smokers quit” would be a very good/good idea “even if a corporate minimum tax *and* tax on hospital revenues were to pass.”

When asked about their concerns, Oregonians were most apprehensive about the unfairness of tobacco users paying into the general fund:

The poll presented arguments that could be made against a tax, and none was accepted by more than 50% of respondents. The highest number (42%) agreed that the following could be a good reason to vote against the tax:

“The money raised from the cigarette tax would go to nonsmoking related projects. This is unfair to smokers who would pay for things like road improvements.”

Oregonians made it clear that they support an excise tax on cigarettes because it can be used for preventing smoking related illnesses, especially since much of the expense of these illnesses is ultimately paid by taxpayers. It is also clear that Oregon voters believe it is irresponsible to use tobacco tax revenues for general fund purposes.

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