



## NEWS RELEASE

### For Immediate Release

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### New Report Reveals State of Tobacco Use in Minnesota's African-American Communities

MINNEAPOLIS/ST. PAUL, Minn., July 27, 2009 – Results from a two-part study of tobacco use in Minnesota's African-American communities were released today, providing the first detailed picture that tobacco use is prominent among African-American adults and that much work is needed to reduce the harms of tobacco in this community. A report, *Tobacco Use Among African-Americans In Minnesota: A Survey and Conversations with African-American Communities*, summarizes findings from two complementary studies:

- 1) Quantitative research from the 2007 Minnesota Adult Tobacco Survey (MATS) sub-sample of U.S.-born African-Americans led by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota (Blue Cross), ClearWay Minnesota<sup>SM</sup>, and the Minnesota Department of Health with guidance from the Minnesota African/African-American Tobacco Education Network (MAAATEN), and
- 2) Qualitative research via community focus groups and interviews, led by Jennifer R. Warren, Ph.D., a community-based researcher and member of the African-American community, and overseen by an advisory board composed of African-American community leaders from MAAATEN, NorthPoint Health and Wellness Center and the Minneapolis Urban League.

The combined results provide a guide that can be used to develop tailored strategies for ultimately reducing tobacco use and exposure to secondhand smoke.

Highlights from the quantitative survey:

- Using definitions set by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the study found 28 percent of U.S.-born African-American adults in Minnesota are current smokers, 10 percent are former smokers and 62 percent have never smoked. This compares to 17 percent of all adult Minnesotans who were current smokers according to MATS 2007.
- Heavy smoking is rare among African-American adults in Minnesota. Seventy-nine percent of current smokers said they smoke fewer than 15 cigarettes per day, and less than one percent said they smoke 25 or more cigarettes per day.

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- More than 70 percent of African-Americans adults in Minnesota who smoked in the past year tried to quit. Yet only 42 percent of smokers who tried to quit in the 12 months before the survey used some kind of stop-smoking assistance, such as stop smoking medications or behavioral counseling.
- Nearly two-thirds of African-Americans reported breathing secondhand smoke at home, at work, in a car or at another location in the week prior to the survey.

The research also describes the social environments of African-Americans that can influence smoking and quitting. The MATS African-American study found that approximately 70 percent of African-American adults in Minnesota have someone close to them who uses tobacco and nearly 40 percent live with a smoker. Many participants in the community-based focus groups validated these findings, commenting that it seems like “everyone smokes” in their community. In fact, community members thought the smoking prevalence rate is actually much higher than the MATS finding of 28 percent of U.S.-born African-American adults. Similarly, community members felt the secondhand smoke exposure was also underestimated in the MATS findings.

Other insights and recommendations from the focus groups and interviews with community members and leaders included:

- Acknowledgement of the many underlying issues that influence smoking and the ability to quit (stress, socioeconomic factors, growing up among smokers, and the addictive power of nicotine) and that the community needs to address these.
- A sense that using assistance to quit was not wide spread and a belief that willpower is the key to quitting smoking successfully.
- Agreement that, in addition to continuing higher tobacco prices and clean-indoor air policies, there is a need to conduct more tailored public education—especially around the harms of tobacco and access to stop-smoking assistance—and to use voices and success stories of individuals in the community.

“Tobacco use is the leading cause of death in the U.S. and when you look at rates of heart disease, stroke and cancer, its affects are even more devastating in the African-American community,” said Dr. Marc Manley, vice president and medical director for Population Health, Blue Cross. “Understanding African-American’s use of and views on tobacco is extremely important to improving the overall health of their communities.”

Natalie Johnson Lee, executive director, MAAATEN agrees. “This report shows concretely the work that needs to be done in the African-American community. We plan to use the data from the two studies to mobilize community members and begin developing an action plan built on interventions and strategies to reduce tobacco use in our community.”

Dr. Warren will present the findings at a forum Monday, July 27, at 11 a.m.-1 p.m. hosted by NorthPoint Health and Wellness Center in Minneapolis. Also, special guest La Tanisha Wright, national states director for the National African-American Tobacco Prevention Network (NAATPN), will be on hand to share experiences from her years working within the tobacco industry.

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Copies of the report, *Tobacco Use Among African-Americans in Minnesota: A Survey and Conversations with African-American Communities*, are available on the MATS website at [www.mnadulttobaccosurvey.org](http://www.mnadulttobaccosurvey.org) or on any of the collaborating organizations' websites.

## **COLLABORATING ORGANIZATIONS**

**Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota** is the largest health plan based in Minnesota, covering 2.8 million members in Minnesota and nationally through its health plans or plans administered by its affiliated companies. Prevention Minnesota is Blue Cross' unprecedented, long-term commitment to tackle preventable heart disease and cancers throughout Minnesota by addressing their root causes: tobacco use, exposure to secondhand smoke, physical inactivity and unhealthy eating. Prevention Minnesota is funded by Blue Cross' settlement proceeds from its landmark lawsuit with the tobacco industry, in which Blue Cross was a co-plaintiff with the state of Minnesota. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, a nonprofit corporation, is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association. Blue Cross has provided stop-smoking programs for its members since 2000. Blue Cross also funds efforts to advocate for policy changes that help to reduce tobacco use and secondhand smoke exposure, works with high priority populations to raise awareness of the harm of tobacco use and promotes workplace health improvement. For more information, go to [www.bluecrossmn.com/preventionminnesota](http://www.bluecrossmn.com/preventionminnesota).

**ClearWay Minnesota**<sup>SM</sup> is a nonprofit organization that strives to enhance life for all Minnesotans by reducing tobacco use and exposure to secondhand smoke through research, action and collaboration. ClearWay Minnesota serves Minnesota through its grant-making program, QUITPLAN® Services to help people quit smoking and statewide outreach activities. QUITPLAN Services helped more than 14,800 adult Minnesotans successfully quit tobacco use. ClearWay Minnesota designs and develops innovative statewide multimedia campaigns to inform the public of QUITPLAN Services and raise the awareness of the harm of secondhand smoke exposure. ClearWay Minnesota also works to build capacity and engage priority populations in reducing the harm that tobacco causes their communities. ClearWay Minnesota was created in 1998 when the state received \$6.1 billion from its settlement with the tobacco industry and 3 percent, or \$202 million, was dedicated by the Ramsey County District Court to establish the independent nonprofit organization. For more information, go to [www.clearwaymn.org](http://www.clearwaymn.org).

The **Minnesota African /African-American Tobacco Education Network** (MAAATEN) is a coalition of African and African-American community leaders working to engage African-American and African communities throughout Minnesota to reduce the harms of tobacco use. Formally convened in 2001, the group emphasizes both health promotion and the reduction of health disparities in African-American and African immigrant communities throughout the state. MAAATEN has received funding from Blue Cross and Blue Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota (Blue Cross) and ClearWay Minnesota<sup>SM</sup> to facilitate these crucial efforts. The group has worked industriously over the past seven years to build a community collaborative galvanized around the mission of promoting health and reducing the harms of tobacco use. Their key work involves educating community leaders, community-based organizations and policy decision-makers about tobacco's toll on African-American and African communities in Minnesota. For more information, call 651-643-3014.

The **Minnesota Department of Health** launched the first state-funded tobacco control program in the nation in 1985 with a portion of the proceeds from a cigarette tax. Since then, MDH has undertaken a number of tobacco control initiatives including participating as one of 17 American Stop-Smoking Intervention Study demonstration states, a national-level comprehensive tobacco control program sponsored by the National Cancer Institute. Funds from an endowment from the state's 1998 settlement with the tobacco industry were available to the department from 2000 through 2003 and were used to launch a comprehensive youth prevention initiative during that period. Currently, MDH works to reduce smoking through grants to reduce youth exposure to pro-tobacco influences, to create tobacco-free environments and to reduce tobacco related health disparities. For more information, go to [www.health.state.mn.us](http://www.health.state.mn.us).

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