



## **Wyoming Mothers Out-Smoke US Mothers 2 to 1: Solutions Available**

**By Marc Homer, Kids Count Coordinator, Wyoming Children's Action Alliance**

The human toll and economic burden of smoking that has been foisted on society is astronomically high. Big tobacco spends billions of dollars marketing tobacco products to men, women, and children worldwide. Big tobacco finances political campaigns and vigorously lobbies government at every level to limit regulations and grease the wheels to keep the money flowing their way.

Well-funded cigarette marketing campaigns easily overwhelm meagerly funded public service campaigns aimed at educating pregnant mothers and others about the dangers of smoking.

Why is this relevant to people in Wyoming communities? The data shows that Wyoming mothers who smoked during pregnancy did so at a rate double the national average, 19.6% compared to 10.2% in 2004. Only Teton and Albany counties fell below the U.S. average for mothers who smoked during pregnancy, 4.3% and 8.2% respectively for the period 2001-2005. Mothers smoked at rates higher than the Wyoming average in several counties, as high as 33.3% in Niobrara, and 26.5% and 28.7% in two of Wyoming's more populous counties, Natrona and Sweetwater.

According to the U.S. Surgeon General's report, smoking during pregnancy increases the risk of pregnancy complications, premature delivery, low-birth-weight infants, stillbirth, and sudden infant death syndrome.

More than 21 million adult women and 1.8 million girls in the United States currently smoke cigarettes putting them at risk for heart attacks, strokes, lung cancer, emphysema, and other life-threatening illnesses. Each year, more than 178,000 U.S. women die from smoking-caused diseases.

Here are three recommendations that will lead to a reduction in the number of Wyoming women who smoke during pregnancy:

1) Communities can leverage their power against big tobacco marketing and lobbying campaigns to help foster a culture that discourages mothers from smoking. In the U.S., 22 states have passed smoke-free laws that cover restaurants and bars. Whole countries have also taken action, including England, France, Ireland, Italy, New Zealand, Scotland, Sweden, Norway, and Wales. So have hundreds of cities and counties across the nation, including a handful in Wyoming. A 2006 University of Wyoming (UW) study found that Laramie's smoke free ordinance did not negatively impact the local economy.

2) Wyoming citizens can vote for politicians who support legislation aimed at improving the health of women and children, such as the reauthorization of the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

The bipartisan CHIPRA bill (2007) would have funded SCHIP for another five years and simultaneously weakened the ethically challenged tobacco industry by raising the tax on all tobacco products by 61-cents. Regrettably for America's children, the bill was vetoed by the President.

Studies in state after state have shown that higher cigarette taxes are one of the most effective ways to reduce smoking by both youth and adults. Every 10 percent increase in the price of cigarettes will reduce youth smoking by about 7% and overall cigarette use by about 4%.

A UW study (2006) showed that raising the state cigarette tax from \$0.12 to \$0.60 per pack in 2003 reduced cigarette sales by 275,000 packs per month. A residual benefit from the increase in Wyoming's cigarette tax was that state tax revenue quadrupled with an increase of approximately \$1.6 million per month. Today, Wyoming's cigarette tax is still well below the U.S. state average of \$0.95 per pack.

3) Health professionals, clergy, friends, grandparents, parents, teachers, coaches, and others should encourage smokers, especially mothers and prospective mothers, to enroll in the Wyoming Quit Tobacco Program. The program offers cessation medications, counseling and education for a low-cost or for free based on participants' income level. The program is available by phone at 1-800-QUIT-NOW or on the internet at <http://wy.quitnet.com>.

By making healthy babies and smoke-free pregnancies the priority, we protect children and lessen the toll society pays for its smoking habit.