



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**NORTH CAROLINA GETS BETTER GRADES ON PREVENTING TOBACCO USE;
NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY STILL LAGGING**

New Law Protecting All Restaurant and Bar Workers from Secondhand Smoke Will Improve Health and Prevention Grade Starting in 2010

CHAPEL HILL, NC – May 27, 2009 – North Carolina is getting healthier when it comes to avoiding tobacco, particularly among youth, but it remains too difficult to make healthy choices. At least one in five adults and kids use tobacco, two-thirds of adults are overweight and obese, and too few people get enough physical activity. NC Prevention Partners presented these and other findings in its statewide Prevention Report Card 2009 Update, which grades North Carolina on how well it supports residents in being healthy.

“Healthy policies – such as tobacco-free worksites – make it easier for North Carolinians to be healthier,” said NC Prevention Partners President & CEO Dr. Meg Molloy. “You can’t choose a healthy option if you don’t have one. Whether it’s quitting tobacco, picking a lower calorie food item, or getting more physical activity at work or home, stronger policies and programs are needed to make it easier for North Carolinians to make healthy choices.”

2009 N.C. Prevention Grades		
Tobacco: C+	Nutrition: D	Physical Activity: D

Highlights from the 2009 Report Card Update

Overall Tobacco Grade: C+

- There are 1.5 million adult smokers in NC (22.9% of adult population).
- In the past year, NC’s adult smoking rates did not decrease (the national adult smoking rate dipped below 20% for the first time on record).
- Mirroring national trends, fewer middle school youth (9%) and fewer high school youth (27%) currently use tobacco compared to two years ago (11% and 29%, respectively).
- NC has the fifth weakest cigarette tax in the nation (\$0.35), and hundreds of thousands of North Carolinians are still exposed to tobacco smoke at work.

“There has been some very good news about tobacco’s waning popularity in North Carolina,” said Dr. Molloy. “Teen smoking has decreased significantly in the past year, and North Carolina has taken a giant step forward by ensuring that all restaurant and bar workers won’t have to breathe dangerous secondhand smoke at their workplace. However, it is troubling that adult smoking rates have not gone down. Making all workplaces smoke free, making it easier to get medication and counseling to help tobacco users quit, and increasing the state cigarette tax – as Governor Perdue has proposed – are important ways to prevent more illness and early death, and significantly improve North Carolina’s health.”

Overall Nutrition Grade: D

- Overweight and obesity rates among N.C. adults (65%) are higher than the national average (63%).
- Overweight and obesity rates are increasing faster in NC (10% growth since 2002) than the nation (7% increase across the U.S. since 2002).
- Youth obesity rates in N.C. are fifth worst in the nation.
- Less than one third (28%) of restaurants in N.C. label their healthy items. This hasn't increased significantly in almost a decade.

“Getting worthless, cheap calories has become too easy,” said Peg O’Connell, Chair of NC Prevention Partners and External Affairs Manager of the National Forum for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention. “Two thirds of North Carolina adults are overweight or obese – these rates have increased faster here compared with the national average. Rates of diabetes have increased by 40% since 2002. That means we’ll have lots of preventable heart disease, stroke and diabetes. Making healthy foods available and providing calorie and other nutrition information at a consumer’s point of selection – can help North Carolinians make choices to support healthy weight.”

Overall Physical Activity Grade: D

- Less than half (44%) of NC adults get their recommended 30 minutes of physical activity per day, compared to 50% in the U.S.
- More high school and middle school students watch at least three hours of TV each school day than attend daily physical education in school.
- Almost 60% of NC adults spend the vast majority of their workday sitting.
- A majority (60%) of North Carolinians would increase their physical activity if they had better access to sidewalks or trails.

“We all know the benefits of regular physical activity, yet less than half of adults and many kids don’t get the recommended amount,” said Whitney Davis, MPH, Lead Author of the *Report Card*. “Just as policies for tobacco and nutrition are needed, policy makers – whether they are elected legislators or the president of a company – can create or strengthen policies to make eating healthier and getting physical activity easier.”

North Carolinians Die Two Years Earlier From Preventable Causes

	North Carolina**	National Avg.***
Life Expectancy	75.8 years	77.8 years

About NC Prevention Partners' 2009 Prevention Report Card Update

The 2009 *Prevention Report Card Update* is a compilation of data published in 2005 – 2008 from sources including the NC Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, and the Youth Tobacco Survey; a full set of references is listed in the *Report Card*. Prevention grades are based on progress made against Healthy People 2010 goals for the nation. For more information, visit: www.ncpreventionpartners.org/reportcard.

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NC Prevention Partners has guided all North Carolina acute-care hospitals to establish 100% tobacco-free campus policies. We partner with NC health insurers to strengthen preventive health insurance benefits.