

DC Cancer Consortium Opposes Tobacco Rating
April 3, 2013

The DC Cancer Consortium urges DC HBX Insurance Market Committee to vote NO as it considers rating tobacco.

Authorizing insurers to raise premiums up to 50% for smokers could have the dangerous impact of pricing people out of the insurance market who most require tobacco cessation services and programs. Should insurance become unaffordable for these DC residents, they will lack all support necessary to make quit attempts. As you know, quitting smoking is not easy, and no evidence exists to support the contention that financial incentives alone increase quit rates. Though the Consortium passionately seeks to reduce tobacco use in the District, this measure will not accomplish that.

Furthermore, the District has not invested in public cessation programs in recent years, and the Quitline has faced ongoing budget challenges. We fear an even further degradation of available cessation initiatives - accompanied by increased illness and expense - should the rating be permitted. 700 District residents die each year from tobacco use, and total direct and indirect costs attributable to tobacco in DC exceed \$600 million annually. Rating tobacco, increasing premiums, pricing many residents out of the market, and thereby eliminating cessation options from DC's low and middle-income population could lead to very real health impacts for our neighbors, and continued escalating costs for the District.

We ask you to vote against tobacco rating, which no other lifestyle behavior or disease category faces. Our goal is to have every smoker in the District quit, but research suggests that tobacco rating will not help achieve this aim. Quite possibly it would exacerbate the health and financial costs caused by tobacco use.

The Consortium and our partners will continue to urge the District to strengthen legislative and regulatory restrictions on tobacco use, sale, and marketing. However, as we do, we hope that current smokers will receive the cessation services and support they need to quit. Tobacco rating will simply limit or completely prevent this necessary option for too many District residents. Please oppose the tobacco rating proposal.