



## News Release

**For Immediate Release**  
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### **Utah Department of Health Launches Tobacco Education Campaign for Native Americans**

(Salt Lake City - UT) - The Utah Department of Health (UDOH), in collaboration with Huntsman Cancer Institute's Native American Outreach Program, recently launched a creative, culturally tailored tobacco education campaign targeting Native Americans who live in Utah.

Traditionally, tobacco has been used by many tribes for spiritual and ceremonial purposes and is considered sacred. However, increased use of commercial cigarettes and tobacco has led to many health problems among Native Americans. Tobacco companies at times use Native American imagery and patriotic messages to encourage this use.

"Tobacco use in the Native American population is a unique issue," said Heather Borski, program manager, UDOH's Tobacco Prevention and Control program. "We believe that it is very important to educate users about the risks of use of commercial tobacco, while respecting traditional uses and customs."

There are almost 30,000 Native Americans in Utah. In 2002, 19.1 percent of Native Americans in Utah were current smokers, compared to 12.9 percent of adults overall in Utah (BRFSS 2000). Native Americans have the highest tobacco use rate of any ethnic population in the state.

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“In the case of tobacco education, cultural awareness of the spiritual vs. recreational use of tobacco will help clarify the message,” said Phyllis Nassi of the Huntsman Cancer Institute’s Native American Outreach Program. “In a time where we, as Native Americans, identify with our traditional heritage, tobacco use in the non-traditional way carries risk. This message needs to be put in a form that not only explains the risk, but is presented in a culturally sensitive and culturally charismatic way.”

Six posters were created, distinguishing between traditional and commercial use, for posters and billboards. Appropriate images are used to illustrate the messages. For example, two pictures of Native American men using tobacco are displayed. The first picture shows a man using natural tobacco in a ceremonial setting, with the word “spiritual” below. This is contrasted with a second picture showing a man smoking a cigarette, with the word “spiritless” below. Other posters juxtapose “prayers” and “poisons,” “ceremonial” and “commercial,” “creation” and “pollution,” “natural” and “unnatural,” and “positive” and “negative” uses and situations. Two posters focus on the use of tobacco during pregnancy.

The UDOH identified the need for culturally appropriate materials for the Native American population regarding tobacco use, and went through an extensive review process involving representatives from all Utah tribes. The posters will be distributed through tribal health leaders and local health departments that work with the tribes.

Native Americans and others who need help quitting tobacco use are encouraged to call the Utah Tobacco Quit Line at 1-888-567-TRUTH. The quit line is in operation Monday through Thursday from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m., Friday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

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