

Economic Impacts of Tobacco Free Generation

Many people consider it immoral to equate dollars with human lives. Though the Board of Health's responsibility to help reduce the diseases caused by tobacco use, there are also important economic implications. This topic can be addressed directly.

Sadly, some people emphasize the small negative impact on local nicotine dealers. In contrast, there is a very strong case that the positive economic impact of Tobacco Free Generation for all Belchertown residents outweighs that on dealers.

- Academic researchers suggest that a (modal) average for smokers is about 15 cigarettes per day. Obviously, some smokers smoke a couple of daily cigarettes, whereas others smoke several packs. Nevertheless, 15 is a good, defensible approximation.
- In round numbers, that means that the average smoker spends about ten dollars a day, or \$3,650 annually on cigarettes.
- If there are over 1000 smokers in Belchertown (a decent estimate), then they are spending over \$3.6 million per year. Most of that money is leaving Belchertown, leaving Massachusetts, and is going to Big Tobacco. That same \$3.6 million could be spent here in Belchertown restaurants and other retailers.
- Regarding Tobacco Free Generation (TFG), for every 100 young people who do not each start spending \$3,650 annually on cigarettes, they will collectively have \$365,000 more annual disposable cash in their pockets. That is money they can spend on recreation, education, and other positive uses.
- There is evidence that many people successfully quit smoking when they are educated about the financial benefits of quitting.
- The "elephant in the room" is the enormous additional costs all of us pay for tobacco-caused health problems. Our taxes are higher. Our Medicare premiums are higher. Private medical insurance premiums are higher. Non-tobacco businesses suffer higher costs when employees have higher rates of absenteeism and illness, estimated at an astounding \$365 billion. Families suffer when smokers cannot work.
- In effect, all of us are subsidizing the profits of Big Tobacco for the negative economic effects of their addictive drug nicotine. (Oh, and 480,000 Americans die every year from nicotine addiction.)