

May 11, 2017

The Honorable Brad Wenstrup  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Health  
Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
337 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Wenstrup:

We write in support of H.R. 1662, which would make facilities of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) smoke-free. Tobacco use is the leading preventable cause of death in the United States and exposure to secondhand smoke has a significant impact on Americans' health.

The Surgeon General has determined there is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke, and sick and disabled veterans should not be subjected to secondhand smoke in order to receive medical care. As a nation, we must do more to improve and protect the health of our veterans. Providing a smoke-free VHA system for our veterans is an important step in the right direction.

Cigarette smoke contains more than 7,000 chemicals and compounds. Hundreds are toxic and at least 69 cause cancer. A December 2016 U.S. Surgeon General report found that "e-cigarette aerosol is not harmless and can contain harmful and potentially harmful constituents, including nicotine." The only effective way to protect people from secondhand smoke is to provide 100 percent smoke-free air. Designated smoking rooms, expensive ventilation systems and similar partial approaches do not protect people from the dangers of secondhand smoke.

People with heart and lung disease are at higher risk for health complications if they are exposed to secondhand smoke. According to a 2015 health survey of veteran enrollees' health, of the 5.7 million users of VHA services in 2014, 5.2 percent, or nearly 300,000, had COPD; 25.5 percent, or nearly 1.5 million, had hypertension; and 7.7 percent, or nearly 439,000, had coronary artery disease. These former service members will benefit more than most as a result of your bill.

Our organizations are pleased that your bill's definition of 'smoke' includes the smoking of cigarettes, e-cigarettes, cigars, pipes, and any other combustible tobacco products. While we are strong supporters of H.R. 1662, we believe the legislation could be further strengthened to prohibit the use of smokeless tobacco products and to shorten the lengthy five year implementation date regarding the smoke-free outdoors policy at VHA facilities. We urge you to consider these recommendations as the bill proceeds through the legislative process.

We look forward to the improved health that veterans will enjoy as a result of this legislation.

Sincerely,

Action on Smoking & Health  
American Academy of Family Physicians  
American Academy of Oral and  
Maxillofacial Pathology  
American Association for Dental Research  
American Association for Respiratory Care  
American Cancer Society Cancer Action  
Network  
American College of Occupational and  
Environmental Medicine  
American College of Preventive Medicine  
American Dental Association  
American Heart Association  
American Lung Association  
American Medical Association  
American Medical Student Association  
American Psychological Association  
American Public Health Association  
American Society of Clinical Oncology  
American Thoracic Society  
Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights  
Association of State and Territorial Health  
Officials  
Association of Women's Health, Obstetric  
and Neonatal Nurses  
Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids  
ClearWay Minnesota  
Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of  
America  
Eta Sigma Gamma - National Health  
Education Honorary  
International Association for the Study of  
Lung Cancer  
Lung Cancer Alliance

National African American Tobacco  
Prevention Network  
National Association of County and City  
Health Officials  
National Association of Pediatric Nurse  
Practitioners  
National Association of Social Workers  
National Center for Health Research  
National Hispanic Medical Association  
National Latino Alliance for Health Equity  
National Network of Public Health Institutes  
Oncology Nursing Society  
Prevention Institute  
Public Health Solutions  
Society for Cardiovascular Angiography and  
Interventions  
Society for Public Health Education  
Society for Research on Nicotine & Tobacco  
Students Against Destructive Decisions  
The Society of State Leaders of Health and  
Physical Education  
The Society of Thoracic Surgeons  
Trust for America's Health