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**NEW MEXICO RESIDENTS WANT MORE SPENT ON
PUBLIC HEALTH RESEARCH**

Survey finds strong support for increased cigarette tax to fund public health programs

Albuquerque, New Mexico—March 31, 2004—A poll released today by Research!America and the University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center demonstrates New Mexico residents' support for increased funding for public health research. Nearly three quarters (73 percent) of residents believe that the current spending level—less than one cent of every health care dollar—is not enough. Most (71 percent) say they would support doubling or more than doubling public health research funding.

The poll also shows 76 percent of New Mexico residents would support increasing the state's tax on cigarettes and other tobacco products, currently 91 cents per pack of cigarettes, to fund public health research. At the same time, 82 percent of residents believe that money received by the state from the tobacco settlement should be spent on research to find cures for and prevent all diseases.

"While medical research and treatment enable Americans to live longer and healthier lives than ever before, far too many people die each year of diseases that could be avoided through prevention," stated Representative Tom Udall. "The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently reported that obesity will soon overtake cigarette smoking as the leading cause of preventable death in America. Being overweight or obese makes people far more likely to develop a whole range of deadly health problems, including diabetes, heart disease and cancer, and prevention is the key. I believe we must explore prevention and treatment approaches that can help combat health problems and at the same time lower the cost of rising medical care."

The poll also revealed public support for other health-related research and funding:

- 94 percent of New Mexico residents believe it is important to study the relationship between lower income households and minorities and increased health problems such as diabetes, heart disease and infant mortality.
- 75 percent think that the tobacco settlement funds should be used to fund programs to prevent tobacco use. Three quarters think that public health research focused on tobacco use should be a top priority or at least a somewhat high priority.

- 77 percent trust federal, state, tribal and local public health departments to inform them about benefits from research on health lifestyles such as physical activity, eating a healthy diet and not using tobacco. Half (51 percent) trust their traditional health practitioners such as medicine men or curanderos.
- Residents identify cancer (97 percent), diabetes or high blood sugar (95 percent), heart disease and stroke (92 percent), HIV/AIDS and respiratory diseases (89 percent) as top or at least somewhat high priorities for public health research.

“This poll illustrates that New Mexico residents clearly value promoting better health for everyone regardless of economic status,” said Phil Eaton, vice president, University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center, “Clearly, the citizens of this state see the importance of investing public funds in disease prevention, which will ultimately save lives, reduce suffering and save money.”

“Prevention and public health research are finding ways to protect and promote health,” said Mary Woolley, president of Research!America. “With adequate support, prevention research can be a crucial force in preventing disease and disability.”

The poll also found that New Mexico residents are willing to put their vote behind increases to improve access to health care including prescription drugs (88 percent). A full 87 percent of those polled said they would be more likely to vote for a candidate who supports increased funding for research to find cures and prevent disease. Support for education and job creation (both 91 percent) topped the list when choosing candidates.

The poll was commissioned by Research!America’s Prevention Research Initiative in partnership with the University of New Mexico Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention. Research!America is a not-for-profit, membership-supported public education and outreach alliance founded in 1989 to make medical and health research—including research to prevent disease, disability and injury and to promote health—a much higher national priority.

Harris Interactive® conducted the poll by telephone within New Mexico with 808 adult residents ages 18 and over between February 2, 2004 and February 23, 2004. The survey data were weighted by age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, income, Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), household size and the number of telephone lines in the household to reflect the demographic composition of the New Mexico population using the March 2002 Current Population Survey from the U.S. Census Bureau. The results have a statistical precision of plus or minus 4 percentage points of what they would be if the entire population of New Mexico had been polled with complete accuracy.

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