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New North Carolina Institute of Medicine Report Includes Recommendations to Prevent 30,000 Deaths Occurring Annually in North Carolina

April 2, 2009 – Morrisville, N.C. –Each year, there are approximately 76,000 deaths in North Carolina. About half, or 36,000, are preventable.

Today, the North Carolina Institute of Medicine (NCIOM) officially releases its interim report, “Prevention for the Health of North Carolina,” highlighting key steps the state can take to reduce preventable death and disability and improve the state’s national health rankings. The report was developed by the NCIOM task force on prevention, which is studying preventable risk factors that contribute to the 10 leading causes of death and disability in the state. The task force has developed evidence-based recommendations to address these leading risk factors.

“This task force is taking a close look at proven ways we can improve health in the state through prevention. Health improvement strategies that are grounded in prevention are an investment in health and in the future of the state,” said Pam Silberman, NCIOM president and CEO.

From May to November of last year, the task force studied five preventable root causes of poor health, including tobacco use, physical inactivity, poor nutrition, risky sexual behavior and substance abuse and addiction. These five underlying causes led to approximately 30,000 preventable deaths across North Carolina in 2007. In addition, many preventable health conditions can lead to poor quality of life, less productive workers and higher health care costs.

“North Carolina’s adult tobacco use rate of 22.9 percent is among the highest in the nation, almost two-thirds of the adults in the state are overweight or obese and nearly half of all new sexually transmitted diseases occur in youth between ages 15 and 24. Prevention can help ease these and other health burdens facing millions of North Carolinians,” said Dr. Jeffrey Engel, state health director and task force co-chair.

Of the many recommendations developed to date, the task force selected seven as priority recommendations for inclusion in its interim report.

1. Increase the state’s tax on cigarettes and other tobacco products
2. Enact comprehensive smoke-free laws to cover worksites and public places including restaurants and bars
3. Support more nutritious food in elementary schools
4. Implement quality physical education in all public schools
5. Implement a statewide plan to combat obesity
6. Mandate comprehensive sexual education in all public schools
7. Develop and implement a comprehensive substance abuse prevention plan

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Investments in prevention may help slow the growth of health care costs, as chronic diseases that often arise can have substantial costs. For example, studies have shown that the increasing rate of obesity is directly responsible for 12 percent of the annual increase in health care costs.

The task force will continue to meet through June of this year and will issue its final report and a Prevention Action Plan for the state in the fall of 2009. The report and plan will further address the underlying causes of death and disability covered in the interim report and will also address other causes such as injury and infectious disease. The plan will serve as a blueprint for many of the state's prevention activities over the coming years.

“This plan will provide a much needed framework that will guide local, regional and state strategies to prevent leading causes of death and disability among North Carolinians,” added Silberman.

The task force project is a collaboration of the NCIOM and the Division of Public Health, North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. The task force's work is supported by the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation, The Duke Endowment, the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust, and the North Carolina Health and Wellness Trust Fund.

The full interim report is available at <http://www.nciom.org>.

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About the North Carolina Institute of Medicine

The North Carolina Institute of Medicine (NCIOM) is an independent, quasi-state agency that was chartered by the North Carolina General Assembly in 1983 to provide balanced, nonpartisan information on issues of relevance to the health of North Carolina's population. The NCIOM convenes task forces of knowledgeable and interested individuals to study complex health issues facing the state in order to develop workable solutions to address these issues.

<http://www.nciom.org>.

About the North Carolina Division of Public Health

North Carolina Public Health (NCPH) works to promote and contribute to the highest possible level of health for the people of North Carolina. A wide range of North Carolina Public Health programs and services, on both the state and local levels, work together to protect and improve the health of the people who live and work in North Carolina. <http://www.ncpublichealth.com>

About the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation

The Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation (BCBSNC Foundation) is a separate, independent, charitable foundation with the mission of improving the health and well-being of North Carolinians. Its focus is improving the health of vulnerable populations, supporting physical activity and nutrition programs and helping nonprofit groups improve their organizational capacity. Since its inception, BCBSNC Foundation has invested into the community more than \$46 million through 294 grants to organizations throughout North Carolina. More information is available at <http://www.bcbsncfoundation.org>.

About The Duke Endowment

The Duke Endowment, in Charlotte, N.C., seeks to fulfill the legacy of James B. Duke by enriching lives and communities in the Carolinas through higher education, health care, rural churches and children's services. Since its inception in 1924, the Endowment has awarded more than \$2.4 billion in grants. <http://www.dukeendowment.org>

About the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust

The Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust's mission is to improve the quality of life and quality of health for the financially needy of North Carolina. The Trust accomplishes its work through two divisions: the Poor and Needy Division, which responds to the basic needs and invests in solutions to improve the quality of life for Forsyth County residents, and the Health Care Division, which addresses the health and wellness needs of financially needy residents across the rest of North Carolina. Since its inception in 1947, the Trust has awarded more than \$439,450,000 in grants. <http://www.kbr.org/index.cfm>.

About the North Carolina Health and Wellness Trust Fund

The NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund makes North Carolina stronger, both physically and economically, by funding programs that promote preventive health. Created by the General Assembly in 2000 to allocate a portion of North Carolina's share of the national tobacco settlement, HWTF has invested \$199 million to support preventive health initiatives and \$102 million to fund prescription drug assistance programs. For more information, please visit <http://www.HealthWellNC.com>.