

## **Health Policy Watch**

### ***How Do We Spend \$8.5 Billion Over the Next 26 Years?***

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Michigan will receive \$8.5 billion over the next 26 years from the national tobacco settlement. Determining the most appropriate use for the money is going to be a major task for the State Legislature. Governor John Engler has proposed to spend the majority of the money on scholarships, however, several lawmakers have countered his proposal with the following three initiatives:

- Michigan Health and Wellness Fund
- Public education and the reduction of class size
- Merit-based college scholarships and Hope Scholarships

According to Raj Wiener, an attorney with Wiener Associates, a Lansing-based advocacy firm, “communities will play a pivotal role in informing Lansing policymakers about the importance of using the tobacco settlement funds for health-related activities.” The group has drafted a Tobacco Spending Plan Proposal that targets three areas:

- Prevention and reduction of tobacco use
- Creating healthier communities and health status
- Expand access to affordable and adequate insurance coverage for uninsured populations

Wiener also argues that “more than \$400 million has been pulled out of Medicaid in the past two years, and more savings are assumed for this year. The health care system is reeling from the cuts, to the point that access to health care has been jeopardized.” She goes on to say that changes in the health care system require long-term commitment and that “only communities can explain the problems with access to care and the benefit of prevention to their legislators in terms that will be meaningful.”

The public must send the message emphasizing the importance of prevention and other long-term solutions to health care issues. —**Compiled by Rachel Gunther of The Access Project**

*If you are interested in obtaining a copy of the proposal, you can contact Wiener Associates at 517-374-2703.*