

(Your name and address)

Dear **(Editor's Name)**:

Everyday, as a healthcare professional in Florida, I see the effects smoking has on the people I care for and their families. Heart disease, the worsening of complications of diabetes, pulmonary conditions like emphysema, and, of course, cancer – all of these are directly and negatively affected by smoking.

Smoking impacts nearly every citizen of Florida, either first-hand or through second-hand smoke. Teenagers continue to begin smoking at ever-younger ages – now at the rate of almost 4,000 per day. The costs in terms of lost wages, loss of health, and loss of hope as these smokers become sick are overwhelming to our community. Something needs to be done.

This is why I am writing you to express my hope that **(name of newspaper)** will support a proposed increase in the cigarette tax.

It is not often that citizens volunteer to have a tax increased, but Florida's cigarette tax at \$0.339 per pack is the fifth lowest in the nation, only slightly higher than rates levied by tobacco-producing states. The national average state tobacco tax is \$1.19 per pack. Moreover, our state tax has not been raised in *19 years*.

And why is a tobacco tax increase a good idea? Because nothing has been shown to reduce teen smoking as much as an increase in the price per pack. Adult smoking drops four percent and youth smoking by seven percent with each ten percent increase in price.

And there's more. Without an increase in the tobacco tax, the Medicaid programs, which fund services for the Medically Needy and Aged/Disabled, will be eliminated. This means that 45,000 Florida citizens will lose their healthcare coverage. Not only will these persons become sicker, but their unfunded visits to emergency rooms and urgent care centers will overwhelm hospitals and healthcare agencies.

The facts supporting an increase in the tobacco tax are overwhelming. If you would like to learn more, you can visit: www.fha.org/coalition. Working in healthcare has made me aware of the absolute importance of increasing – not decreasing – money to help stop smoking and enhance the healthcare we provide to all Floridians.

Sincerely,

(your name)