

BLASTFAX

Legislative Update: Medicaid Budget in Deep Deficit, Tobacco Tax Increase Still in Play; Contact Your Rep's Now

The Georgia General Assembly is in recess until next Monday. Due to the dismal situation with the state budget, they are considering a 2% reduction in Medicaid reimbursement rates to physicians; and a 1.6% hospital tax. If you are concerned about the impact this will have on your practice and community please contact your local Senator and Representative. We believe an increase in the state tobacco tax is a better solution. Tell them:

It's Good for our Kids (and adults) Health:

- Tobacco related illnesses cost the healthcare system millions of dollars
- Higher taxes means less teens take up smoking
- As smoking decreases their associated healthcare costs will decrease

It Can Fill the Hole in the Medicaid Budget:

- Tobacco tax dollars can balance Medicaid budget without drastic cuts
- Pediatricians are heavily impacted by Medicaid—2/3 of those surveyed have Medicaid volumes of over 50%.
- This means reimbursement cuts will likely reduce access for children.
- 28% of physicians surveyed would consider stop taking Medicaid if fees are cut

It Just Makes Sense:

- Georgia's tobacco tax is far lower than the national average
- Raising it by \$1 will only put us at the national average.
- Recent polls say 73% of voters support increasing the tobacco tax to help with the state budget deficit.

And then there's the Politics:

- Both Republicans and Democrats must be supportive of the tobacco tax increase for it to become reality. Neither party will do so, without the other going along. It's an election year.

For more Talking Points on this issue visit our website at www.gaaap.org. To find your state Representative or Senator is, go to our website and visit the Legislative Affairs page. Click on the link and enter your address and zip. You can even send an email from there. Please act soon. The tobacco tax increase is one important option to avert deep cuts in healthcare in Georgia. If you have further questions, please call the Chapter office (404-881-5091).

Thank you,

Melinda Willingham, MD
Chair, Committee on Legislative Affairs