In support of SCIENCE

Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights (ANR) is the country's only national organisation representing individuals seeking to enforce their right to breathe clean air, free of the toxins of secondhand smoke. Through its long history, tireless efforts, and continuous application of the trial-and-error method, ANR has learned the important basic rules of how to achieve this goal. We humbly offer that vast body of knowledge and experience as part of our petition for continued federal support of ASSIST-like programmes.

The NCI, charged with leading the nation's war against cancer, spent at least a decade searching for the "safe" cigarette. Then NCI came to understand that it would be much more effective and efficient simply to help people not to smoke. The Institute spent the next 15 years researching effective interventions toward this goal. What that research demonstrated, and what tobacco control advocates everywhere now understand, is that, while we approached tobacco use in the traditional disease model—attempting to "cure" one smoker at a time through cessation programmes, and to forestall initiation through prevention programmes similarly aimed at individuals—we were doomed to fail. With tobacco advertising and promotional expenditures reaching as high as \$6 billion per year, we would never be able to "unsell" cigarettes nearly as quickly as the industry could sell them.

Great insights have come from our understanding the limitations of these approaches based on the individual disease model, which ignored the control that tobacco companies maintained over the social environment in which individuals made their decisions whether or not to smoke. Tremendous advances in tobacco control have come from our more recent efforts not to change individuals, but to alter the environments in which individuals make healthy or unhealthy decisions.

For the past seven years, NCI has funded a large-scale intervention research, under the acronym ASSIST, that has proven this approach to be effective. ASSIST should be thought of as a clinical trial representing a unique partnership among the NCI, the American Cancer Society (ACS), state health departments, and public and private organisations across the country. ASSIST has applied the body of research on tobacco use prevention and control toward reducing the prevalence of smoking (and incidentally, cleaning the air that non-smokers are also forced to breathe), with amazing success.

Although ASSIST is the largest and most comprehensive tobacco control project ever sponsored by the federal government, and although tobacco control is involved in a third of all cancer deaths, ASSIST comprises only 1% of NCI's total budget. In fact, the total annual budget of ASSIST is only 0.0002 of the \$100 billion in direct healthcare services and lost productivity that tobacco use costs this country each year. Given the incredible reductions in tobacco consumption during the first half of the intervention phase, ASSIST represents one of the greatest, and most cost-effective, successes ever supported by the federal government for improving the health and lives of our citizens.

If ASSIST were a drug or a vaccine, pharmaceutical manufacturers in the private sector would be competing fiercely for the right to conduct further research and development, and then to market it for profit.

However, the ASSIST clinical trial is different. Although the profits in selling cigarettes are almost unfathomable, there is no profit in programmes that successfully reduce tobacco use. This is why the federal government's role in continuing to support research and development of community-based interventions is absolutely indispensable.

The federal government, in particular the NCI, must take what we have learned in ASSIST to the next level by supporting

SCIENCE. This is the primary and indispensable role for federal government—to support the basic research that would not be effective or cost efficient for any individual state to conduct, but the results from which could support all state efforts.

This is our best advice from the trenches of tobacco control. We do not need any more bench research on the deleterious health effects of tobacco, nor ways to make smoking less

deadly. We need to know how to get even better at countering the tobacco industry's ubiquitous promotion of cigarettes, and helping people not to smoke.

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