



**House Finance & Tax Committee
Rep. Craig Headland, Chair
Feb. 9, 2021
Testimony in Support of HB 1422**

Good morning, Chairman Headland and members of the committee. My name is Marnie Walth and I represent the Health Policy Consortium. HPC is a healthcare advocacy organization that includes Trinity Health in Minot, Altru Health Systems in Grand Forks and Sanford Health in Fargo and Bismarck. Collectively, HPC members provide 80 percent of the acute healthcare services in North Dakota.

HPC supports HB 1422 because it seeks to make North Dakota a healthier state. Our health care providers see patients every day dealing with the effects of first- and second-hand smoking—heart disease, lung disease, stroke, cancer, asthma and diabetes. Tobacco use is the single most preventable cause of disease, disability, and death in the United States and one of the most difficult substances to stop using.

Because the nicotine in cigarettes is extremely addictive and patients struggle to stop using it, we know the best way to protect our patients from this harmful substance is to take steps to help ensure they never start. Among the list of evidence-based strategies to prevent tobacco use is increasing the cost of tobacco, proven to reduce the prevalence of cigarette smoking most notably in young adults.

In addition to the worthy goals of this bill, as introduced, we appreciate the prime sponsor's interest in using it as a means of permanently funding Medicaid Expansion, a critical program for well over 20,000 North Dakotans that has provided much needed healthcare stability amidst the pandemic. While this is one of many ideas being discussed to permanently fund Medicaid Expansion, it is one we hope the committee favorably considers.

Thank you for your time and your consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions.

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