

## THE CHRONICLE OF PHILANTHROPY UPDATE

May 10, 2007

### Seven American Lung Association Affiliates Sever Ties With National Charity

By [Elizabeth Schwinn](#)

The Chicago affiliate of the American Lung Association this week announced that it will separate from the association, the latest in a string of affiliates that have severed their ties with the national organization.

The departure of the influential Chicago affiliate from the national association, which raises about \$100-million a year, brings to seven the number of affiliates that have decided to part ways with the American Lung Association in protest of a consolidation plan it approved three years ago in an effort to become more efficient. The New Hampshire affiliate decided last month to leave the association. Other affiliates, including several large California chapters, left last year.

As of July 1, the Chicago group, currently known as the American Lung Association of Metropolitan Chicago, will become the Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago.

Officials at the Chicago organization say they made the decision to leave because the American Lung Association wants the local group to give up its status as an independent charity and become part of a regional organization that serves six states. The Chicago board believes the charity can be more effective if it has the power to focus solely on local issues, said Joel Africk, chief executive officer of the Chicago affiliate.

"We just have a fundamental divergency in our opinion about how to best serve the mission," Mr. Africk said. "We felt that given the problem of urban asthma, for example, which isn't the same as asthma in rural states, the best way to serve our mission is continuing to have a local organization that has its own budget authority, selects its own programs, and gets the job done."

Under the planned reorganization, the lung association of metropolitan Chicago would have become part of a regional chapter serving Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

John Kirkwood, chief executive of the American Lung Association, which has its headquarters in New York City, said the association asked Chicago to join a multistate entity as it seeks to streamline American Lung operations by consolidating 78 state and local affiliates into 11 regional organizations.

"It will bring all kinds of efficiencies into the American Lung Association, which frees more money up for the mission," Mr. Kirkwood said. "There are some who have a different vision of what the future will look like. If they think they can accomplish that vision, we wish them well."



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Like Chicago, the American Lung Association of New Hampshire announced that it would remain an independent entity — to be known as Breathe New Hampshire — rather than becoming part of a New England chapter.

"We have a long history — over 90 years — of serving the people of New Hampshire. We wish to preserve that history and continue to focus on that tradition," said Daniel Fortin, president of the state's lung association.

### **California Departures**

Last year, 5 of 11 California affiliates of the American Lung Association — in Los Angeles, Monterey, Sacramento, San Francisco, and San Jose — severed their ties with the national association to become Breathe California.

"By focusing all of our efforts, resources, and expertise at the local level, the Breathe California offices will be able to expand current programming," the Sacramento affiliate of Breathe said in a statement about the split.

The remaining six California affiliates, including a large chapter in San Diego, are now part of the American Lung Association of California.

Terri E. Weaver, chairman of the American Lung Association's national board, said the association is regretful but not surprised by the departures of the seven affiliates. Most of the association's members are enthusiastic about the reorganization, she said, but from the beginning a few affiliates expressed reservations about the plan.

"Whenever you have a change in your structure, even though 90 percent of the organization feels it's appropriate, there are always going to be those who do not want to be part of the organization," she said.

### **Dollars at Stake**

On paper, the departure of the seven affiliates will cost the national organization about \$1-million in direct annual fees and tens of millions of dollars in total annual gifts, Lung Association officials acknowledged. But Mr. Kirkwood said the association has not actually lost money because it has moved ahead with plans to establish new chapters and raise money in the parts of California where it has lost affiliates. "We are making it up," Mr. Kirkwood said.

Overall, donations to the American Lung Association from individuals, foundations, and corporations have declined steadily in recent years, from \$153-million in 1999 to about \$104-million in 2005, according to figures provided by the charity.

The departures of the New Hampshire and Chicago organizations were precipitated by the national board's decision to include a new clause in its annual contracts with the affiliates that will exact a heavy financial penalty in the future from any local affiliate that decides to leave the organization, local and national charity officials said.

The American Lung Association has long been a collection of independent local organizations that have shared the American Lung Association name. Affiliates pay 13 percent of their revenue to the national office each year.

After the five California chapters left the organization last year, taking their property and assets with them, the national organization began discussing how to prevent such an action in the future.

Last month, the national board voted unanimously to add to its annual contracts a clause that requires any organizations that cease their affiliation with the American Lung Association to turn over their buildings, land, and other assets and reserves to the national entity. The new contracts will take effect July 1, after the existing agreements expire.

Officials at the national association said they do not know of any other affiliates with plans to sever ties with the organization.



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