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**Proposed legislation will give smokers the power to quit**

A bill introduced in the Illinois House and Senate yesterday could save lives and reduce health care costs in the state by requiring insurance coverage for smoking cessation services and medications.

Sponsored by Senator Heather Steans and Representative Sara Feigenholtz, the new law would require every private insurer to provide at least \$500 in coverage or reimbursement annually for tobacco use cessation programs and/or medications for plan enrollees who are 15 years of age or older. Coverage would include: counseling and support groups; over-the-counter nicotine replacement therapies; and prescription medications.

"This is smart public policy," said Senator Steans. "Coupled with the public health benefit, Illinois will also see a positive return on investment for smoking cessation. Employers and insurers will save money by reducing the health care expenses associated with treatment of diseases caused by tobacco use."

Studies have demonstrated that a combination of counseling and medication is the most effective means for helping smokers successfully quit. "It's important," said Joel Africk, president and chief executive officer of Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago, "that Illinois insurance providers support flexibility for people to work with their physicians to determine a smoking cessation method that will work best for them."

Commenting on her personal commitment to this bill, Representative Feigenholtz said, "I was like most smokers, having a difficult time breaking the habit... but I finally found the cessation support that helped me quit." She added, "Approximately 70 percent of smokers say they want to quit. We need to decrease barriers and give them the tools they need to succeed."

Janet Williams of the Illinois Coalition Against Tobacco (ICAT) agreed, saying: "Tobacco use is the number one preventable cause of death in Illinois, and has been linked to cancer, emphysema and heart disease. Providing smokers with the tools they need to quit will reduce tobacco-related diseases."

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The **Illinois Coalition Against Tobacco (ICAT)** is dedicated to reducing tobacco's toll on Illinoisans by mobilizing communities and advocating for policy change. It has been in existence more than 35 years and is one of the oldest tobacco control coalitions in the country. Its lead agencies include the Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago, American Lung Association of the Upper Midwest, American Heart Association, Midwest Affiliate, and the Illinois Academy of Family Physicians.

**Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago** has been a local public health leader since 1906. Today, the association fights lung disease and promotes healthy lungs by supporting research, public policies and educational efforts on behalf of individuals and families affected by lung cancer, asthma, chronic bronchitis and emphysema (COPD) and other lung diseases. For more information, visit [www.lungchicago.org](http://www.lungchicago.org).