

# Preschool, child health advocates urge support of federal tobacco tax

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Local and national child advocacy groups have announced their support of a proposal by President Barack Obama to expand early childhood education by increasing the federal tax on tobacco sales.  
Jeffrey D. Allred, Deseret News

## Summary

Local and national child advocacy groups have announced their support of a proposal by President Barack Obama to expand early childhood education by increasing the federal tax on tobacco sales.

SALT LAKE CITY — President Barack Obama's proposal to expand early childhood education by increasing federal tobacco taxes would enroll an additional 4,135 Utah children in preschool and help prevent 9,900 Utah children from becoming addicted smokers.

Those are the findings of a report released Wednesday by a [coalition of organizations](#) including the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, the American Heart Association, the American Lung Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics.

While no bill is currently being considered at the national level, funds from the president's proposed 94-cent per pack increase would likely be appropriated to federally-funded early childhood education, such as Head Start or school district-based Title 1 programs.

"Granite School District has a waiting list of about 1,000 kids each year," said Karen Crompton, president of Voices for Utah Children, "and that's just Granite School District."

Crompton was joined Wednesday at the Utah State Capitol by Anna Guymon of the Weber-Morgan Health Department and Charles Pruitt of Primary Children's Medical Center. The three spoke in favor of Obama's proposal as both a way to increase early education for at-risk and low-income children and as a deterrent to teen smoking.

Guymon said that dips in Utah's cigarette consumption have coincided with years when additional taxes were levied. She said that since the [last state tobacco tax increase in 2010](#), youth tobacco use rates have declined in Weber and Morgan counties by 14 percent.

"Every 10 percent increase in cigarette prices reduces youth smoking by about 7 percent, and total cigarette consumption by about 4 percent," Guymon said.

Crompton said their support is not solely limited to the specifics in the president's plan. But she said they are pleased that a national discussion has begun on how to address the needs of low- and moderate-income children.

"Right now we have too many kids who smoke and too few kids with an opportunity to attend preschool," she said. "This really gets at both."

State Sen. Allen Christensen, R-North Ogden, was a key supporter of Utah's 2010 tobacco tax increase. He said he considers anything that increases the cost of tobacco as a "win" situation, but is skeptical of earmarking those tax dollars for a specific expenditure.

He said by tying a program's funding to tobacco sales, the financial solvency of that program then becomes dependent on a nation or state of smokers.

"I don't like the idea of funding a specific program with it, I just like the idea of making tobacco more expensive," he said. "Why do we have to spend it? Why don't we apply it toward the debt or something like that?"