Public Health Wins at the Polls in California and South Dakota

California bans the sale of menthol cigarettes and other flavored tobacco products; South Dakota extends access to Medicaid.

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On Tuesday, November 7, California voters passed Proposition 31 to end the sale of menthol cigarettes and other flavored tobacco products and South Dakotans passed Amendment D to increase access to Medicaid to more than 42,000 people. In South Dakota, voters approved Amendment D, which amends the state constitution to expand Medicaid eligibility to adults with lower incomes. In California voters upheld the 2020 law that will reduce tobacco use and health disparities caused by the tobacco industry's targeting of Black communities.

The following is a statement from Dr. Karen E. Knudsen, CEO of the American Cancer Society (ACS) and the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN):

"Voters in South Dakota and California made it clear on Tuesday that public health is a priority in their states. By passing measures to increase access to health coverage through Medicaid and reduce the deadly toll of tobacco by ending the sale of flavored tobacco products, a critical tool the industry uses to hook new generations, voters have signaled their commitment to ending cancer as we know it, for everyone.

"South Dakotans' vote to make their state the 39th state to increase access to Medicaid is a major victory for public health and will improve the lives of many cancer patients, survivors and their loved ones who will newly gain access to lifesaving health insurance coverage. ACS research repeatedly shows the importance of access to care in reducing health disparities and improving cancer outcomes. ACS CAN volunteers and staff worked tirelessly to educate the public on the importance of increasing access to health insurance for more of their neighbors, family and friends.

"ACS CAN will continue working with South Dakota lawmakers to ensure this initiative goes into effect on July 2, 2023, as well as to strongly pursue Medicaid expansion in the 11 other states that have refused to advance this lifesaving public policy change.

"In California, voters approved Proposition 31, upholding a statewide law prohibiting the sale of most flavored tobacco products, including menthol cigarettes. ACS CAN was integral in the

passage of the 2020 law that aimed to reduce youth tobacco initiation and the tobacco industry's targeting of Black communities, who consistently report the highest prevalence of menthol cigarette use. ACS research showed that Massachusetts law ending on the sale of menthol cigarettes lowered all cigarette sales in the state. Knowing just how impactful this law would be, the tobacco industry brought Prop 31 to the ballot to delay implementation. But Californians chose public health over the tobacco industry, a move that will have significant impact on the number of future tobacco-related diseases, including cancer. We look forward to ensuring the statewide law, which was passed in 2020, is effectively implemented immediately."

Tuesday's midterm elections also welcomed in a new Congress and many new governors and state legislators across the nation, each of whom ACS CAN is readily prepared to partner to continue our work to reduce suffering and death from cancer.

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