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A blow struck against smoking

Editorials

Updated: 11/19/2009 06:35:03 AM EST

Thursday, Nov. 19

The state's smoking cessation program offered in 2006 to low income residents was designed to improve health and save both lives and money. It has succeeded beyond expectations, putting Massachusetts at the forefront of efforts to help people break this costly, deadly habit.

Researchers from the Massachusetts Tobacco Cessation and Prevention Program (MTCPP) reported Wednesday that smoking rates among the poor, historically the population with the highest smoking rates, had dropped by 26 percent in the first two years of the ongoing program. Hospitalizations for heart attacks among cessation benefit users plummeted 38 percent in the first year alone, 18 percent fewer visited emergency rooms for asthma symptoms in that first year, and birth complications dropped 12 percent. The initiative, which through Medicaid pays for virtually all of the costs of cessation counseling and drugs, works and works extremely well.

The program was instituted as part of the state's pioneering health care reform initiative and demonstrates the importance of prevention. The cost of the MTCPP program is far less than the cost of treating patients with smoking-related illnesses like lung cancer, heart ailments and emphysema. Congress should take note of a state program that reduces health care costs as well as the misery brought by this terrible addiction.

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