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**Health Reform Column:**

*Rising health care costs attributed to unhealthy living*

*The following is a column by Joe Tilghman, MS, Retired Midwest Consortium Administrator for Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and Board member of the Kansas Health Policy Authority (KHPA), regarding the need for prevention and personal responsibility in the delivery of health care in Kansas:*

Health reform in Kansas requires that all of us take greater personal responsibility for our health. Not only will Kansans be healthier, but we will also save money in the long term. In Kansas, approximately 356,000 adults currently smoke. While in recent years, the messages have been loud and clear that smoking is bad for your health, people still choose to smoke. The message we need to share is that smoking is bad for health care.

In Kansas, smoking is attributed to more than \$927 million in health care expenditures every year for both emergency and chronic care. With more than 3,900 deaths annually due to cigarette smoking, tobacco is the number one preventable cause of death in our state. Secondhand smoke also contributes significantly to health care costs; this exposure has been found to cause heart disease, lung cancer, respiratory problems, and asthma attacks.

As the cost of health care continues to rise, we must focus our efforts on finding and enacting solutions to the problem. One of the Kansas Health Policy Authority's health reform goals is to pay for prevention to reduce health care costs. In the case of tobacco, cost savings could be as much as \$3 for every \$1 spent on tobacco prevention programs. Another goal is to promote personal responsibility by embracing healthy behaviors – encouraging those that smoke to quit, ensuring that our young folks don't ever start, and protecting Kansans from secondhand smoke.

These two goals do not just impact individuals; they transcend to our health care system. Currently, we pay for treating illnesses, injuries, and chronic diseases. Instead, Kansas needs a system that creates incentives for health care consumers, providers, and insurers to pay for wellness. Rather than paying for expensive procedures to treat smoking related diseases, let's redirect our money towards paying for less expensive prevention methods.

KHPA invites your health reform comments and suggestions as we search for sustainable methods of reducing longer-term health care costs. Please visit our website at [www.khpa.ks.gov](http://www.khpa.ks.gov) to learn more about the Health Policy Authority's current efforts for health reform and to send us your thoughts about health care reform in Kansas.

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*\*\*The Kansas Health Policy Authority is a state agency created to develop and maintain a coordinated and data-driven health policy agenda, and it was tasked this year with reforming health care delivery in Kansas. On November 1, 2007, the Kansas Health Policy Authority Board will report to the Governor and Kansas Legislature health reform options aimed at improving the health and health care system in Kansas.*

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