



45 Ash Street
East Hartford, CT 06108

Tel. (860) 838-4379
Fax (860) 289-5405
E-mail matchcoalitionct@gmail.com

**Testimony in Support of House Bill 6305
An Act Concerning Implementation of the Sustinet Plan
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My name is Dr. Pat Checko. I am Chairman of the statewide MATCH Coalition (Mobilizing Against Tobacco for Connecticut's Health). I would like to speak in support of HB 6305. I was part of the tobacco workgroup that worked with the Tobacco and Smoking Cessation Task Force on their report to the Sustinet Board, and in the case of the taskforces, to the Legislature as well. Two important recommendations of the Task Force are addressed in this plan.

Require all public and private health insurers to provide comprehensive tobacco usage cessation interventions, including counseling and all FDA-approved nicotine replacement therapies and pharmaceuticals. Tobacco remains the most preventable cause of death due to heart disease and stroke, cancer and respiratory diseases in the United States. Tobacco use is highly prevalent in the United States, and the adverse effects of cigarette smoking have a heavy impact on employers as well as the individuals themselves. Employers assume the costs of health care, disability, and lost work time for employees who smoke. Due to the cost-burden of smoking on employers, providing smoking cessation benefit coverage for employees can be extremely valuable.

For businesses, making an investment in tobacco cessation benefits not only improves employee health but also reduces the significant direct and indirect costs associated with tobacco use. In fact, paying for tobacco use treatment is regarded as the single most cost-effective health insurance benefit for adults and it is also considered the benefit with the most positive impact on health. Smoking cessation benefit coverage yielded a greater number of successful quit attempts and a decreased rate of smoking-related diseases. Cost savings (reduced health care and workplace costs) over 4 years exceeded the cost of the smoking cessation benefit.

Chronic diseases are closely associated with a number of common, cross-related risk factors. New models to prevent and control disease must take on a more integrated approach that acknowledges that modifying behavioral and environmental factors are critical to a total wellness model.

Such approaches will save lives and save money.

Patricia J. Checko, Dr. P.H.
Chairman, MATCH Coalition

MOBILIZE AGAINST TOBACCO FOR CONNECTICUT'S HEALTH