



MOVING IDEAS INTO ACTION

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, January 20, 2015

**OKLAHOMA ACADEMY RELEASES STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING
OKLAHOMA'S HEALTH STATUS**

Prioritized recommendations aim to make a significant impact in reversing the state's poor health trends.

Oklahoma City – Accepting federal funds offered through the Affordable Care Act, expanding alternatives to incarceration and a statewide ban of smoking in public spaces are among the priority recommendations developed at the Oklahoma Academy's 2014 Town Hall entitled "We Can Do Better: Improving the Health of the Oklahoma People."

Oklahoma Academy members and Town Hall participants joined Oklahoma Academy Chairman Greg Main, Town Hall Planning Committee Co-Chairs Kay Goebel, Ph.D. and Steve Prescott, MD, president of OMRF, Representative Le Denney, Town Hall participant, and Oklahoma Academy President and CEO Julie Knutson for the official release of the 2014 Town Hall prioritized recommendations at a press conference held at the State Capitol this morning.

"The final report from the 2014 Town Hall includes all the recommendations from the Town Hall," said Main. "The prioritized recommendations we're releasing today, however, are those that will most immediately confront our state's most critical health issues and ultimately improve the economic viability of our state as a whole."

Main said that Town Hall participants discussed and produced a variety of recommendations in four areas that shape health: history and culture, environmental factors, behavioral factors, and health care services.

“The Oklahoma Academy made a deliberate choice up front not to address the Affordable Care Act and Medicaid Expansion,” said Main. “However, it was, across all panels, the recommendation determined most critical to improving health in Oklahoma, especially for the underserved. “

In addition to accepting Federal funds, participants recommended that the Oklahoma Legislature increase the funding for the Federally Qualified Health Centers by matching Federal funds, thereby fully funding the uncompensated care pool to \$10 million and expanding FQHC access throughout the state. FQHC care should be proactive rather than reactive care and should include mental health and nutritional counseling services to help break the cycle of so many Oklahomans who access these services.

Participants determined that because there is a direct link between adult incarceration and childhood trauma, especially when incarceration separates parents from children, Oklahoma should expand alternatives to incarceration through drug courts, mental health courts, community sentencing, and nonprofit programs such as Women In Recovery (Tulsa) and ReMerge (Oklahoma City). Such programs should especially focus on keeping families together.

In 2008, the Oklahoma Academy Town Hall recommended fully funding the ODMHSAS “Smart on Crime” initiative. Participants at the 2014 Town Hall recommend re-emphasizing this recommendation to reduce incarceration, save state funding, better treat individuals with mental health and substance abuse problems and keep more families together.

Participants of both the 2008 and the 2014 Town Halls noted that, while the long-term goal is to decrease the financial and health costs of incarceration to the state and its citizens, an initial investment is needed to expand mental health and substance abuse treatment and prison diversion programs.

Town Hall participants recognized that in order to improve the longevity and health of all Oklahomans, we must encourage and incentivize citizens to stop using tobacco. Three recommendations to accomplish decrease tobacco use were put forth: a Governor’s initiative petition for a statewide ban of smoking in public places, a state tax increase on all tobacco products with a portion of the revenue directed to the Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust for tobacco cessation programs, and passing legislation reducing or eliminating tobacco coupons, sampling and discounting.

In order to move forward with these recommendations, it is appropriate and important to promote a collaborative, progressive dialogue between the State of Oklahoma and Oklahoma’s 39 Federally recognized tribal governments to develop a mutually acceptable taxation initiative concerning tobacco products.

Additional prioritized recommendations to improve the health status of Oklahoma include: creating a unified message and educational campaign to improve health literacy and offset the widespread addictions in Oklahoma to fast food and sedentary lifestyles, include Personal Health and Fitness Education and physical activity classes as a part of the standard curriculum in Oklahoma's K through 12 education systems, and develop and implement an effective "health exchange information system" that includes better coordination across state agencies.

"Our first objective is to share these recommendations with policy makers and the citizens of Oklahoma," said Julie Knutson, president and CEO of the Oklahoma Academy. "The Oklahoma Academy is committed during the 2015 legislative session and beyond to working with policy makers, private industry and communities across the state to implement the recommendations."

More information about the Oklahoma Academy, the 2014 Town Hall on Oklahoma's health and the resulting recommendations is available at www.okacademy.org.

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