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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tobacco Cessation Focus For North Carolina's Indian Tribes

First-ever Smoke-free Unity Conference and Pow-Wow

Raleigh, NC – Once deeply rooted in Native American culture, tobacco was no longer welcome at the 30th annual North Carolina Indian Unity Conference. Tobacco addiction was one of the many issues addressed at the smoke-free conference in Raleigh, NC. The Unity Conference is the only event that brings together all of the state's Native American tribes.

The Native American population suffers from the highest death rates of tobacco-related diseases. "If you remember the children's song *The Ten Little Indians*, the Indians died one by one until the last little Indian died from heartache," said Lawrence Shorty, a Native American tobacco historian. "Well, four out of ten Indians are smokers, and tobacco contributes to the four major Indian killers of lung cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and stroke."

During a serious panel discussion about Native Americans and tobacco, panelists discussed the "Many Voices, One Message: Stop Tobacco Addiction" Initiative. The tobacco-free effort is the work of the North Carolina Commission of Indian Affairs and is funded by the NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund (HWTF) as part of its statewide teen tobacco use prevention initiative. The goal is to promote healthy environments and prevent the addiction, disease, and death from tobacco use and second hand smoke.

Unity leaders announced a new "crusade" in public schools to help young Native Americans both appreciate the historic uses of tobacco among tribes and understand the grave health risks that tobacco products pose. "Historically many Native Americans, especially those living in North Carolina, were raised to embrace tobacco. But when you see people sick from tobacco related diseases, it changes your opinion," said Gladys Hunt, president of the United Tribes of North Carolina.

During the discussion, compelling artwork by Native American children adorned the walls. The creative artwork contained messages about the dangers of tobacco use. One poster declared "Smoke Makes You Choke."

"It is important to protect all of North Carolina's children from the harmful effects of tobacco use," said Lt. Gov. Beverly Perdue, HWTF chair. "Preliminary research indicates that our teen tobacco use prevention campaign is reaching and influencing more youth than ever before, and it's because of the hard work of great organizations such as the North Carolina Commission of Indian Affairs."

In addition to Thursday afternoon's tobacco prevention seminar, a colorful pow-wow on Thursday evening celebrated traditional Native American music, dance and dress. Of course, the pow-wow was also tobacco-free.

The tribes represented at the Unity Conference included the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina, Coharie Indian Tribe, Haliwa-Saponi Indian Tribe, Sappony, Meherrin Indian Tribe, Occaneechi Band of Saponi Nation, Waccamaw-Siouan Tribe and the Eastern Band of Cherokee.

ABOUT THE NC HEALTH AND WELLNESS TRUST FUND:

The NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund makes North Carolina stronger, both physically and economically, by funding programs that promote preventive health. Created by the General Assembly in 2000 to allocate a portion of North Carolina's share of the national tobacco settlement, HWTF has invested \$127 million to support preventive health initiatives and \$78 million to fund a prescription drug assistance program. For more information, please visit www.hwtfc.org.

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