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For Immediate Release

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New Survey Finds Alcohol and Tobacco Products Still More Available than Milk and Fresh Fruit

Weaverville, CA – March 8, 2017 – New research shows that in Trinity County it is still easier to buy cigarettes and alcohol at local stores than fresh fruit and vegetables. This finding is part of new research released today on the availability and marketing of tobacco products, alcohol, condoms and healthy and unhealthy food options in California stores that sell tobacco.

Today, throughout California, health advocates held 13 press events to release results of the scientific survey, which is the largest of its kind. It builds upon initial research released three years ago in March 2014 and provides insights into changes in the availability and marketing of the studied products during this time. Information was collected in the spring and summer of 2016 from more than 7,100 stores in all 58 California counties including pharmacies, supermarkets, delis, convenience and liquor stores as well as tobacco-only stores. There were 21 stores surveyed across Trinity County in 12 different communities.

“Overall, the findings show a continuing discrepancy in our county in the accessibility and marketing between products that promote a healthy lifestyle, and those that don’t,” said Tricia Aberg, who coordinates prevention programs, including the Tobacco Education Program, for Human Response Network (HRN). “Stores play a critical role in our community’s health, and this survey shows that more needs to be done to help our local stores provide healthy, affordable options for our communities. Our goal is to work with stores and community members toward a healthier Trinity.”

The survey found the following for Trinity County:

- All 21 surveyed stores sold tobacco products, but only 62% of stores sold fresh fruits or vegetables.
- 52% of stores sold non- or low-fat milk, but 90% sell alcohol.
- E-cigarettes saw a significant increase in Trinity County in stores from the last time this survey was conducted, up more than 37%.

“The expanded availability of e-cigarettes are of particular concern and reflect the spike in use by teens and young adults in the last few years,” said Ms. Aberg. “Trinity County youth are not immune to the national trend of increased e-cigarette and vape use. Data from the California Healthy Kids Survey indicates that local teens are trying and using e-cigs and vapes more often than regular cigarettes.”

Another goal of the survey was to examine the accessibility and marketing of healthy and unhealthy products to youth.

“This survey found that our community’s youth are regularly exposed to unhealthy messages and choices. We need to change what information and options our kids receive and work to surround them with healthy choices and messages instead,” said Yoni Desmond, Substance Abuse Counselor and Prevention Coordinator for Trinity County Behavioral Health Services (BHS) and Alcohol and Other Drug Services (AODS). Ms. Desmond facilitates the Trinity High School Friday Night Live (FNL) Program and works directly with youth in the county to prevent underage drinking.

The survey found the following for Trinity County with regard to advertising and access:

- Alcohol, sugary drinks (like soda and energy drinks), and tobacco were the products most commonly advertised on storefront windows. In contrast, no surveyed stores had advertisements for healthy products, like water or fruit, on their windows.
- More stores (86%) now sell flavored non-cigarette tobacco products, including flavored chew, e-cigarettes, and little cigars. These tobacco products often have kid-appealing flavors, such as grape, watermelon, chocolate, gummy candies and even breakfast cereals.
- Flavored alcoholic beverages, known as alcopops due to their similarity in flavor and packaging to fruit flavored sodas and energy drinks, are widely available in local stores. Almost all of the stores sold alcohol and of those, 95% sell alcopops.

Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community is a statewide campaign formed by tobacco prevention, nutrition, alcohol abuse prevention and STD prevention partners collaborating to improve the health of Californians by informing them about the impact of unhealthy product availability and marketing in the retail environment.

Human Response Network has partnered with local agencies and volunteers including Trinity County Public Health, AODS, Trinity High School Friday Night Live, and the UC Extension Nutrition Education Program to work on the joint goals of improving access to healthy foods while limiting the influences of tobacco and alcohol in our community on local youth.

Ms. Aberg explained that the survey is only one part of a larger project. “Human Response Network is committed to continuing to work with local health advocates, stores, and partners to provide access to healthy food and help make the healthy choice the easy choice for Trinity County residents. We would love to have more community involvement in our program. Anyone who is interested in improving the health of our county can contact me at the HRN for more information about how to get involved.”

For state and county-specific data and more information on Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community, please visit www.healthystoreshealthycommunity.com.

Human Response Network is a private, non-profit organization that strives to improve the lives of all Trinity County residents through its programs and services. For more information visit www.humanresponsenetwork.org or call (530) 623-2024.

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