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NEW INTERACTIVE TOBACCO PREVENTION APPROACH REVEALED AT STATE CAPITOL
Strategies for Preventing Sales to Minors Emphasized

HARTFORD, Conn. (February 6, 2014) – A launch event demonstrating a new interactive merchant training focused on the prevention of tobacco sales to minors was held today at the State Capitol. Funded by the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, the new online training, **“Tobacco Sales: Do the Right Thing,”** is a product of the Connecticut Tobacco Merchant and Community Education Initiative administered by Wheeler Clinic’s Connecticut Center for Prevention, Wellness and Recovery.

Pat Rehmer, MSN, ACHE, Commissioner of the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, and Dr. Jewel Mullen, Commissioner of the Department of Public Health, offered opening remarks. Training developer Ron Goldman, Co-founder and CEO of Kognito Interactive, offered a brief demonstration of the online training. The launch event closed with a “call to action” for tobacco retailers to take advantage of the free online training.

“Tobacco Sales: Do the Right Thing” is a role-play simulation training where front-line retail staff learn about the legal responsibilities and liabilities of selling tobacco in Connecticut. Learners interact with customers and practice strategies on asking for and properly checking identification, dealing with an angry customer, refusing the sale of single cigarettes, coping with peer pressure, and more. The training also provides information about the health implications associated with tobacco use.

“The Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services is committed to preventing smoking among Connecticut’s young people,” said Commissioner Rehmer. “Programs that help educate tobacco merchants can play a real role in keeping tobacco products out of the hands of youth.”

“This innovative training provides information, resources and real-world scenarios to help Connecticut merchants successfully navigate all aspects of the tobacco sales process and prevent sales to youth,” said Susan Walkama, LCSW, President and Chief Executive Officer, Wheeler Clinic.

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Youth Tobacco Use in Connecticut and Nationally

Every year in the US, almost 1.5 million youth smoke their first cigarette, and about 350,000 become addicted, nearly 1,000 youth every day. In Connecticut,

- Almost 69,000 middle school and high school students have tried cigarette smoking, and each year 2,900 kids become daily smokers. (2011 CT School Health Survey – Tobacco Component)
- The rate at which retailers sold tobacco to youth under 18 increased from 12.1% in 2012 to 14.8% in 2013. (CT Annual Synar Report 2014)

This free training program is made possible by the State of Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services Tobacco Prevention and Enforcement Program www.ct.gov/dmhas/tpep.

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About the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS):

DMHAS promotes and administers comprehensive, recovery-oriented services in the areas of mental health treatment and substance abuse prevention and treatment throughout Connecticut. While the Department's prevention services serve all Connecticut citizens, its mandate is to serve adults (over 18 years of age) with psychiatric or substance use disorders, or both, who lack the financial means to obtain such services on their own.

About Wheeler Clinic's Connecticut Center for Prevention, Wellness and Recovery:

Wheeler Clinic's Connecticut Center for Prevention, Wellness and Recovery, a program of Wheeler Clinic, is the state's most comprehensive resource for behavioral health information and a leading provider of professional training and development opportunities, and prevention and health promotion services statewide. The Connecticut Center for Prevention, Wellness and Recovery administers the Connecticut Tobacco Merchant and Community Education Initiative, with support from DMHAS, to reduce youth tobacco access and use.

About Wheeler Clinic:

Wheeler Clinic, founded in 1968, is a statewide independent, not-for-profit, community-based organization that provides a comprehensive continuum of mental health and substance abuse recovery services, primary care, child welfare, special education, early childhood, community justice, foster care, employee assistance and prevention and wellness programs. The clinic serves more than 30,000 children, adolescents and adults in Connecticut each year. Visit www.wheelerclinic.org for more information.