

Russ Sciandra

Russ Sciandra is New York State Director for Advocacy for the American Cancer Society and Director of the Center for a Tobacco Free New York. The Center coordinates advocacy activities of the Coalition for a Healthy New York (CHNY), which is led by the Cancer Society, the American Heart Association and the American Lung Association.

In 1999, CHNY successfully advocated for a doubling of the state's cigarette excise tax, with part of the revenue directed to New York's comprehensive Tobacco Control Program. Russ helped negotiate the bill language establishing the TCP and the Tobacco Control Program Advisory Board, of which he is a member. Despite recent budget cuts, New York's is still one of the largest tobacco prevention programs in the country.

In 2000, the coalition gained enactment of stronger penalties for selling tobacco to children, and the nation's first law mandating fire safe cigarettes. In 2001, the state banned self-service displays of tobacco products in retail stores. In 2002, CHNY won a second cigarette tax increase to \$1.50 a pack. Russ played a major role in directing grassroots advocacy for the 2002 New York City Smoke-Free Air Act, the enactment of which set the stage for the state Clean Indoor Air Act of 2003, banning smoking in all workplaces.

In 2008, the Coalition promoted adoption of a \$1.25 increase in the cigarette excise tax, and in 2010 the coalition successfully advocated for an increase in the tax on all tobacco products, including cigarettes, smokeless tobacco and little cigars. The state's new cigarette tax of \$4.35 is the highest in the nation and nearly an eight-fold increase since 1996.