

# Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Durbin Receives First Ever Public Health Leadership Award**

In a ceremony in his Senate office, Sen. Richard J. Durbin (D-IL) was presented the first ever Congressional Public Health Leadership Award by CAPT Sara Newman, USPHS, Chair of the Board of Directors of the Commissioned Officers Association of the United States Public Health Service.

This award was recently established by the Commissioned Officers Association, a non-profit organization which represents the U.S. Surgeon General, the 6700 officers in the Commissioned Corps of the U.S. Public Health Service and PHS retirees.

Durbin was given the award because of his work in the last Congress that addressed the significant problem of tobacco use by members of the military services. Smoking rates and rates of use of chewing tobacco and “dip” pose significant threats to the well-being of military servicemembers. It has been scientifically demonstrated, for example, that smokers incur a 20% longer hospital stay than non-smokers and have double the risk of post-surgical infection when compared with non-smokers. Smoking is also the killer of some 480,000 Americans every year—making it the leading cause of death in this country. Though overall smoking rates have plunged since Surgeon General Luther Terry released the first report on Smoking and Health in 1964, tobacco use among military servicemembers continues at a dramatically higher rate than among their civilian counterparts. It has also been demonstrated time and again that young people are particularly price sensitive when it comes to tobacco use: raise the price, and use goes down.

According to Senator Durbin: **“Discounting tobacco products on our military bases lures even more service members into this deadly addiction. Ending this subsidy is a commonsense reform that will help protect the health of our nation’s troops. It will literally save lives. I am honored to receive the Congressional Public Health Leadership Award from the Commissioned Officers Association, a powerful ally in our fight to reduce tobacco use in the military.”**

Durbin’s legislation, which originated in his role as then-Chairman of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, was ultimately included in the FY 2015 National Defense Authorization Act and required that the price of tobacco products sold in military exchanges and commissaries be raised to full retail. Tobacco products have long been sold at a significant discount in most military exchanges and commissaries, and Durbin’s efforts will result in elimination of that discount.

- 30 -