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Student peer initiative gets aid from CVS Health

WARWICK – R.I. Student Assistance Services (RISAS) announced today that it has received a \$10,000 grant from CVS Health. The support from CVS Health will help the Varsity Athletes Above Substance Abuse (VAASA) program, a peer leadership program organized by RISAS, get educated on the dangers of tobacco use.

The grant is part of Be The First, CVS Health's \$50 million, five-year initiative to help deliver the nation's first tobacco-free generation and extend the company's commitment to help people lead tobacco-free lives.

VAASA participants are high school varsity athletes in Rhode Island who pledge to remain alcohol- and drug-free, including the use of tobacco products. The athletes are trained to address younger students as positive role models and speak to elementary and middle school students, explaining that it is not necessary to use alcohol or other drugs to be popular. As varsity athletes are often held in high regard by their peers, VAASA provides a unique opportunity to build on the leadership skills already present in athletes by encouraging them to continue to set positive examples for younger students. The program demonstrates that substance abuse need not be

a part of their social life.

With the support from CVS Health, RISAS will host a 2018 conference and ongoing training for over 200 Rhode Island youth athletes that will focus on the dangers of tobacco use. These athletes will participate in a "train the trainers" workshop and learn how to deliver the "CATCH My Breath," a youth e-cigarette/vaping prevention program developed by The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston (UTHealth) School of Public Health and disseminated by the CATCH Global Foundation. These student athletes will be equipped with the knowledge and skills to reach approximately 3,200 additional youth statewide with prevention information from CATCH My Breath.

"According to a recent Kids Count report, more than 19 percent of R.I. high school students and 7.6 percent of middle school students reported using e-cigarettes within 30 days of the date they were surveyed. This funding will support peer leaders with the tools they need to educate younger students about the risks and dangers of electronic cigarettes and vaping," stated Colleen Judge, director of school-based services at RISAS.