

# Serious Gains

## Reducing Tobacco Use Improves Productivity and Profit

Helping your employees who smoke to quit and protecting all employees from secondhand smoke can increase the health of your workforce and your bottom line. There are several ways you can support tobacco control “inside the walls” of your business. A model workplace tobacco control program includes a set of policies, benefits and programs that will encourage employees not to use tobacco in the workplace and to quit using tobacco altogether. A comprehensive approach includes campus-wide tobacco-free policies, first-dollar health plan coverage of tobacco cessation treatment and onsite support and access to tobacco cessation treatment, such as community programs or telephone quitline services. Details follow on how to implement each of these.

### IMPLEMENT MODEL TOBACCO-FREE POLICIES<sup>1</sup>

Tobacco-free policies protect nonsmokers from secondhand smoke and help smokers quit successfully.<sup>2</sup>

- **Adopt a model tobacco-free workplace policy.** Implement a campus-wide policy prohibiting tobacco use —both inside and outside, including company vehicles, rental space and all onsite and offsite locations.<sup>3,4</sup> Model policy language is available at <http://www.cdc.gov/tobaccofree/policy.htm>.

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Employees who smoke have higher absentee rates, lower job productivity and higher health care costs.<sup>5</sup> Cigarette smokers have twice the risk for heart disease—the leading cause of death in the U.S. — and are at even higher risk for many other diseases and illnesses, such as lung cancer and chronic lung disease.<sup>7</sup>

However, within just one year of quitting successfully, a former smoker’s overall health improves, productivity increases and a trend in lower health care costs begins.<sup>8</sup> Tobacco cessation services save lives, improve health and reduce health care costs,<sup>6</sup> yet currently very few employers cover the recommended screening and treatment package.<sup>9</sup> Offering the recommended tobacco cessation package to all smokers nationwide would result in a net medical cost-savings of \$3 billion annually.<sup>10</sup>

- **Promote the policy widely.** Distribute information about the health risks of tobacco use, the consequences of using tobacco in prohibited areas and the availability of proven quitting aids and programs. Post signs indicating a tobacco-free workplace.
- **Support the policy through your company’s infrastructure.** Train supervisors and human resource staff on how to implement and enforce this policy.<sup>5</sup> Remove tobacco products from onsite vending machines, food services, restaurants and retail outlets. Host meetings in smoke-free locales.
- **Make sure employees know the consequences of non-compliance.** Use e-mail, newsletters, payroll inserts and announcements as communication channels to prepare your workforce 60–90 days in advance of your policy implementation date. Send reminder messages with information on programs and services available to help smokers quit.



## OFFER PROVEN TOBACCO-USE TREATMENT BENEFITS THROUGH YOUR HEALTH PLAN<sup>11</sup>

Providing tobacco-use treatment benefits through your health plan increases the number of tobacco users who quit and remain tobacco-free.<sup>12</sup> Effective interventions or treatments include counseling and medications.<sup>13</sup> Health plan coverage of effective tobacco-use treatments costs employers, on average, 10–40 cents per member per month,<sup>8,14,15</sup> but savings exceed the cost of the services within three to five years.<sup>6,12</sup>

- **Identify ways to improve coverage of tobacco-use treatment services.** Investigate what coverage currently exists and what improvements or expansion of coverage is possible under your health plan.
- **Negotiate model benefits with your health plan.** Model benefits language is available at: <http://www.businessgrouphealth.org/tobacco/benefits/index.cfm#recommended>. Make sure to include all of the recommended tobacco-use treatment benefits listed below:<sup>14,16</sup>
  - Effective tobacco-use treatments are provided and/or covered
  - Multiple forms of counseling (i.e., individual, group or telephone) are offered/covered
  - FDA-approved prescription drugs, including bupropion (Zyban®, Wellbutrin®), varenicline (Chantix™), and prescription nicotine replacement therapies (i.e., nasal spray, inhaler, patch) are covered
  - Over-the-counter nicotine replacement therapies (i.e., gum, patch, lozenge) are provided or covered
  - Each course of treatment covers a minimum of four 10-minute counseling sessions, follow-up contact and a 90-day course of medication
  - A minimum of two courses of therapy (i.e., counseling and medications) is covered each 12-month period
  - All copays and other fees for counseling and medications are eliminated or minimized
  - Spouses and dependents are covered
  - Retirees are covered



- **Promote existing coverage for tobacco treatment benefits.** Inform your employees of the benefits available to them through e-mail, newsletters, payroll inserts and Summary Plan Descriptions. Communicate any benefit changes to employees as quickly as possible and encourage employees to talk to their health care providers about effective treatments.<sup>17</sup>

- **Inform your employees of available medications.** Send detailed information on the prescription and drug therapy coverage they can receive through their health benefits. Encourage them to use health savings accounts for services that are not yet covered under your plan.
- **Step up promotion of coverage at opportune times.** Many smokers try to quit at the beginning of the calendar year or just after new tobacco laws or policies are introduced by your community or state (e.g., smoke-free air laws, tobacco tax increases). These policies help encourage smokers to try to quit, so make sure you remind your employees of their options for treatment.<sup>2</sup>

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## COMPREHENSIVE TOBACCO-USE TREATMENT

Comprehensive tobacco-use treatment generally includes three components: screening, counseling and medication (including over-the-counter nicotine replacement therapy).<sup>13</sup> Below is a brief description of the model recommended coverage for each service.<sup>14,16</sup>

**SCREENING** — a medical professional asks the patient if he or she uses tobacco products and is ready to quit. Coverage should include brief counseling efforts by a health care provider during office visits.

**COUNSELING** — a trained provider gives personalized guidance on ways to quit tobacco. Coverage for counseling should include at least four 30-minute sessions of individual (face-to-face), telephone or group counseling. Follow-up should be included for recent quitters (less than one year) to prevent relapse.

**PHARMACY SUPPORT** — FDA-approved medications to help tobacco users quit. Coverage for medication should include all FDA-approved medications. These include over-the-counter and prescription nicotine replacement therapy — i.e., gum, patch, inhaler, nasal spray and lozenge — and prescription non-nicotine medications — i.e., bupropion (Zyban®, Wellbutrin®) and varenicline (Chantix™). Coverage should also allow for use of two medications at a time.<sup>13</sup>

While each of these services is effective alone, a combination of counseling and medication improves success rates, and coverage should allow both.<sup>13</sup> In addition, coverage for up to two 90-day courses of medication and two courses of counseling should be included each benefit year. Co-pays and deductibles should be reduced as much as possible or eliminated to further encourage employees to quit.<sup>2</sup>

Studies clearly show that co-pays and deductibles reduce the use of effective treatments and reduce the number of successful quitters.<sup>2</sup>

By providing support for tobacco users to quit with proven effective methods, you can improve their health, increase their productivity and reduce your health care costs.

## ACCESS TO TELEPHONE QUITLINES FOR TOBACCO USERS

Telephone quitlines offer a convenient and effective option for treating tobacco dependence by providing counseling services at no cost to the tobacco user. Some quitlines also offer access to free or discounted over-the-counter treatment medications.<sup>18</sup> Providing information and direct access to quitlines can increase the number of tobacco users who quit and remain tobacco-free. There are many ways to improve employee access to and use of quitlines:

- **Work with your health plan to minimize or eliminate out-of-pocket costs.** Many existing Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) provide comprehensive quitline services (including screening, counseling and medication assistance). Investigate your options under existing plans, and explore options to extend services to spouses and dependents.
- **Contract directly with a quitline vendor.** Provide quitline services to your employees directly from their desks or workstations. Working with a vendor can allow you to tailor the services to your workforce.<sup>19</sup>
- **Promote the services of your state quitline.** All U.S. states and territories currently run a tobacco quitline and provide free services, although eligibility and extent of services vary from state to state. Your state quitline is available through a portal number: 1-800-QUIT NOW. Contact your state quitline or health department to investigate options to partner with the quitline in your area.<sup>18</sup>
- **Communicate information on quitlines and other available services.** Promote available options to your employees through newsletters, payroll inserts, announcements, brochures, e-mails and your intranet. If services are covered under your health plan, be sure to inform employees about it in the Summary Plan Description. Be sure to emphasize to employees that quitline services are confidential.



## ENDNOTES

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