

QUITLINES 101

A PRIMER FOR HEALTH EDUCATORS



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An estimated 46 million people, or 20.6% of all adults, in the United States smoke cigarettes. Approximately 40% of smokers try to quit each year.¹

What is a Quitline?

Quitlines are telephone-based tobacco counseling services for individuals interested in and/or attempting to quit smoking. Tobacco counselors help smokers develop an individual and effective plan for quitting smoking and answer questions. Quitlines are available in every state, territory, and province in the United States and Canada.² Quitlines are recommended by the U.S. Public Health Services Clinical Guidelines for Treating Tobacco Use and Dependence.³

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Quitline service providers offer a range of services, including:

- Individualized telephone counseling;
- Mailed self-help or informational materials;
- Recorded messages;
- Referrals to local programs and community services.

A Tobacco Quitline is not a typical 1-800 number. It does not sell products or provide a "one size fits all" approach. It's designed to help the smoker take control of his/her attempt to quit.

Why Quitlines?

Quitlines provide effective cessation interventions that can help smokers overcome barriers they face in more traditional cessation programs, particularly accessibility and efficiency. They also offer important advantages from a health education/program perspective. Quitlines function based on a centralized system of operation and promotion allowing for:

- Easier collection and evaluation of data.
- Routine monitoring of counseling for quality assurance and continuity of services.
- Standardized protocols and training for all cessation/counseling activities.

Quitlines are essential elements in the smoking treatment process because they are free, flexible, can be tailored to the caller's needs, and enable access for anyone who needs such services. A large majority of Quitlines are open every day of the week, offering 24-hour support, which increases convenience and accessibility. Most smokers prefer telephone services, and, by providing somewhat-anonymous services, people who would be intimidated in face-to-face settings can get the help they need.⁴



Who Uses Quitlines?

Quitlines across North America receive calls everyday from smokers trying to quit, people seeking information on quitting, family and friends of smokers, and former smokers looking for additional support. Important characteristics of Quitline callers include: ²

- 60% of callers are female
- Nearly half of all callers are between 41 and 60 years of age
- 82.4% of callers are white, 10.2% are African-American, and 4.5% are Hispanic or Latino
- 54% of callers are either Medicaid enrollees or uninsured, while 10% are covered by Medicare and 32% by commercial insurance²

To accommodate the range of needs from the variety of callers, Quitlines provide services in many languages and tailor information to specific populations (i.e., pregnant women, smokeless tobacco users, different age groups).⁴

Quitlines Work to Reduce Smoking

Tobacco use accounts for approximately 400,000 deaths each year and affects an additional 8.6 million persons with smoking-related illnesses.⁵

Strong evidence shows that Quitlines are effective in helping tobacco users quit. Interactive telephone and face-to-face counseling are proven more

Strong evidence shows that Quitlines are effective in helping tobacco users quit. effective than services that only provide educational content or self-help materials.⁶ They are also free,

convenient, take place in the comfort of one's place of residence, and afford anonymity, thus reducing stigma.

Quitlines reach a large number of tobacco users in a cost-effective way by reaching racial and ethnic communities as well as uninsured and underserved populations, and in some cases link tobacco users to broader health related information and resources.⁴

Promoting Quitlines

To reach its full potential in reducing smoking, a Quitline must be widely promoted. Smokers must not only be informed of the services but also motivated and willing to call. There are several ways to raise awareness about the service and increase call volume:⁴

- Mass media campaigns
- Promoting through community-based programs
- Educating healthcare providers to make referrals
- Collaborating with state agencies/ programs to disseminate educational materials that include the Quitline number⁴

If you work for a community-based organization that serves hard-to-reach and under-served populations, find out about promoting the Quitline in your area. Quitlines offer easy-to-use referral programs for professionals in community-based organizations including fax and e-referrals.²

1-800-QUIT-NOW is the national portal number through which smokers in every state, District of Columbia, and some U.S. territories can access telephone-based services.



Key Resources

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/vital_signs/index.htm

² North American Quitline Consortium. Quitline Facts. Accessed online March 3, 2011 at http://www.naquitline_facts.php

³ U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. Clinical Guidelines for Treating Tobacco Use and Dependence. 2008

⁴ Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, <http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/researchfactsheetspdf/0072.pdf>

⁵ Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Best Practices for Comprehensive Tobacco Control Programs. 1999.

⁶ Society for Public Health Education www.sophe.org/

⊕ For More Information

- Advancing Tobacco Cessation Policy www.actiontoquit.org
- American Lung Association www.lungusa.org/tobacco
- CDC Tobacco Information and Prevention Source www.cdc.gov/tobacco/
- National Cancer Institute 1-800-QUIT-NOW www.cancer.gov
- North America Quitline Consortium www.naquitline.org
- Society for Public Health Education www.sophe.org/cppw_home.cfm
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services www.smokefree.gov

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