

State Employee Health Plans Should Cover Tobacco Cessation Treatments



Tobacco use kills more than 480,000 Americans each year. In addition to being deadly, smoking is also extremely costly – in 2013, smoking cost the country between \$289 and \$333 billion in lost productivity and healthcare expenditures.¹ States are bearing the brunt of these escalating costs. One of the ways state governments can save money is by helping employees and their families quit smoking through health benefit plans and wellness programs.

Why is it important for state employee health plans to cover tobacco cessation treatments?

- State and local employee health plans cover about 10 percent of the total U.S. workforce.² Providing cessation coverage through state employee health plans will reach a large amount of smokers who need help.
- State employee health plans are often used as a standard or example for other health plans in a state. Importantly, state employee plans are among the plans states can choose from to serve as Essential Health Benefit benchmark coverage. Leading by example, these plans can help non-state employees too.
- States can save a significant amount of money in tobacco-related healthcare costs by helping smokers quit. A 2010 study conducted by Penn State University showed that for every \$1 a state spends on helping smokers quit, the average potential return on investment is \$1.26.³

How states can help their employees quit:

Several treatments have been proven to increase a smoker's chances of quitting for good. There are five nicotine-replacement-therapies (gum, patch, lozenge, nasal spray, inhaler) that can help smokers, as well as two non-nicotine medications (bupropion and varenicline, known by the brand names Zyban and Chantix). Smokers also benefit from cessation counseling. Individual, group and phone counseling have all been proven to work.

All state employees should have coverage for *all* of these treatments – this will maximize the likelihood of smokers quitting. Many quitters need to try multiple treatments before finding one that works. States can provide this coverage a variety of ways, including through their employee wellness program, prescription drug plan, or ensuring coverage through contracts with managed care organizations or health maintenance organizations.

**Cessation Benefits
Should Include
ALL of These:**

- ✓ NRT Gum
- ✓ NRT Patch
- ✓ NRT Lozenge
- ✓ NRT Inhaler
- ✓ NRT Nasal Spray
- ✓ Bupropion
- ✓ Varenicline
- ✓ Individual counseling
- ✓ Group counseling
- ✓ Phone counseling

Four states are leading the way.

Coverage of cessation treatments for state employees varies widely state-to-state. Right now, four states provide a comprehensive benefit, fully taking advantage of the opportunity to save money and lives by helping their employees quit smoking:

- ✓ Illinois
- ✓ New Mexico
- ✓ North Dakota
- ✓ Rhode Island

¹ U.S.

² National Council of State Legislatures. "State Employee Health Benefits." Updated June 2011. Available at: <http://www.ncsl.org/issues-research/health/state-employee-health-benefits-ncsl.aspx>

³ American Lung Association, Penn State University. *Smoking Cessation: the Economic Benefits*. September 15, 2010. Available at: www.lungusa.org/cessationbenefits