

† AMERICAN LUNG ASSOCIATION®

IN GEORGIA

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December 10, 2009

Dr. Rhonda Medows, FAAFP
Commissioner, GA Dept. of Community Health
2 Peachtree Street, NW
Atlanta, GA 30303

Dear Dr. Medows:

The statistics are alarming: Smoking kills more than 443,000 Americans each year. There are more than 1.3 million smokers in Georgia. That's 19% of our total population - enough people to fill up the Braves stadium more than 24 times. Additionally, the percentage of Medicaid smokers is substantially higher than the general population (33% versus 20%).

In Georgia, nearly 21% of women of childbearing age (18-44 years) reported smoking. Smoking is a major public health problem because not only can smoking harm a man's or woman's health, but smoking during pregnancy can lead to serious health problems in newborns.

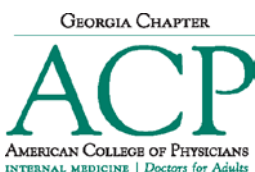
This public health crisis is a fiscal burden to the state. The negative health impact of smoking related illnesses are extremely costly, and states are bearing the brunt of these escalating costs. One of the ways state governments can save money is helping their employees and Medicaid participants quit smoking through their health insurance coverage. Per the statistics above, it's clear that tobacco use has a significant toll on public health and taxpayer dollars

Helping people stop smoking can ease the economic burden. In 2008, the Oklahoma State Department of Health offered tobacco cessation assistance to state employees. An estimated 570 state employees quit smoking the first 6 months, resulting in about \$2.2 million in annual savings, or \$3,800 per successful quitter, through reduced health care costs and increased employee productivity (savings reflects latest health care costs and productivity estimates). The state's investment in providing the expanded coverage totaled about \$367,000, or \$148 per recipient. We urge the Georgia Department of Community Health to learn from Oklahoma's cost-saving experience and offer cessation treatments and counseling. (See attached press release).

In May 2008, the U.S. Public Health Service issued *Treating Tobacco Use and Dependence: 2008 Update*. These guidelines clearly outline that recommended treatments for tobacco use should be covered by public and private health benefit plans. Having access to treatment makes smokers more likely to make a quit attempt – and most importantly – to succeed. Unfortunately, Georgia remains one of a very few states that provides no coverage for access to medications and counseling for Medicaid recipients wanting to quit smoking, nor does our state cover individual counseling or medications for state employees wishing to quit smoking. As the largest employer in the state, Georgia sets the standard (or sets an example) for employers and private health plans across the state.



Georgia Obstetrical
and Gynecological
Society, Inc.



According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), tobacco use is the leading preventable cause of disease and premature death in the United States, and it recommends that health plans do the following:

- > Cover at least four counseling sessions of at least 30 minutes each, including telephone and individual counseling sessions.
- > Cover both prescription medication and over-the-counter nicotine replacement treatments.
- > Provide counseling and medication coverage for at least two tobacco cessation attempts per year.
- > Eliminate or minimize co-pays or deductibles for counseling and medications.

We the undersigned Georgia health organizations, urge that the State Employees Health Plan standard certificate of coverage include benefits consistent with CDC recommended coverage, including payment for tobacco cessation counseling during routine office visits and FDA approved pharmacotherapy products. We also urge that similar benefits be provided for our Medicaid recipients. Let's join the other states which have provided their patients with this cost-savings benefit.

Sincerely,

June Deen, Director of Advocacy
American Lung Association in Georgia

Eric Bailey, Advocacy Manager
American Cancer Society/Georgia

Bill Burns, J.D., GA Advocacy Director
American Heart Association

Vincent M. Nicolais, MD, FACP, FCCM,
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cc: Governor Sonny Perdue
Lieutenant Governor Casey Cagle
Senator Greg Goggans
Representative Ben Harbin
Representative Mickey Channell
Senator Don Thomas
Representative Sharon Cooper
Policy Advisor Mary Eleanor Wickersham

Tobacco Cessation Benefit Provides Major Return on Investment

08-07-2008

Pamela Williams
Office of Communications
405/271-5601

In its first six months, a new insurance benefit to offer more tobacco cessation assistance to state employees has helped an estimated 570 state workers successfully quit using tobacco.

The Oklahoma State Department of Health estimates this action has resulted in about \$2.2 million in annual savings, or \$3,800 per successful quitter, through reduced health care costs and increased employee productivity.

The new benefit became effective on Jan. 1 this year when the Oklahoma State and Education Employees Group Insurance Board (OSEEIGIB) began offering expanded tobacco cessation coverage as part of an effort to promote a healthier state employee workforce and reduce costs. Thus far, OSEEIGIB's investment in providing the expanded coverage has totaled about \$367,000, or \$148 per recipient. The estimated savings reflect the latest research on lower medical costs and higher productivity among workers.

"These savings represent a six-fold return on the state's investment and will continue to accrue each year," said Dr. Mike Crutcher, Oklahoma's Secretary of Health and Commissioner of Health. "This should be a call to action for all health plans and employers to help workers quit tobacco. It's clear that physical health and fiscal health go hand-in-hand."

State workers enrolled in the HealthChoice group insurance plan have the option of receiving two full 90-day courses of any FDA-approved prescription tobacco cessation product each year. Participants may also choose to call the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline (1-800-QUIT-NOW) to further improve their chances of success by working with a personal quit coach to overcome triggers related to nicotine addiction. The Helpline provides free tobacco cessation assistance to all Oklahomans.

"Health insurance costs are directly related to the health and wellness of our citizenry," said Oklahoma Insurance Commissioner Kim Holland. "For the benefit of our citizens and state, all health plans and employers would certainly do well to follow OSEEIGIB's lead."

"This simply makes good business sense. It's much less expensive to prevent heart disease, cancer, stroke and chronic lung disease than to pay for all the medical care to treat these diseases," said OSEEIGIB Chair Richard N. Womack. "Most smokers are already trying to quit and a little help goes a long way."

Tobacco cessation coverage is one of several recommendations in a new toolkit prepared for Oklahoma employers titled Make It Your Business for a Strong and Healthy Oklahoma. The toolkit guides employers through the process of creating fiscally and physically fit businesses and assists them in qualifying for recognition as a "Certified Healthy Business", a fast-growing program co-sponsored by the State Chamber, the Oklahoma Academy, and the State Turning Point Council.

Tobacco use is the leading preventable cause of death in Oklahoma. About one in four Oklahoma adults smoke. In any given year, most make at least one serious attempt to completely quit smoking.