

## The American Lung Association's Comments on HEDIS® Measures for Health Plan Accreditation in 2018 – Specific Comments on the Smoking and Tobacco Use Cessation Measures

On December 16, 2016 the American Lung Association submitted the following comments in response to NCQA's invitation to comment on HEDIS® Measures for Health Plan Accreditation in 2018 – Specific Comments on the Smoking and Tobacco Use Cessation Measures.

The American Lung Association **does not support** the removal from the commercial product line of the HEDIS/CAHPS measure:

*“Medical Assistance with Smoking and Tobacco Use Cessation – **Advising Smokers to Quit rate**”* and urge the NCQA to continue to require this critically important measure component.

There are approximately 36 million adults in the US that smoke cigarettes or about 15 percent of the population. ***This very large number of patients who smoke challenges the stated rationale for removing this measure (“small denominator issue”).*** In fact, the prevalence of smoking is a more common behavior than many other conditions that are assessed by NCQA measures. If there is a problem with the “denominator,” we suggest NCQA reassess the method used to count the number of patients who use tobacco and who receive advice to quit.

Most smokers (over 70%) visit a primary care clinic annually. These visits are a unique opportunity to intervene to help smokers quit. The importance of that intervention is highly critical from a health perspective. Smoking is a leading cause of illness, costly both in terms of human life and money, including 90% of COPD, 30% of cardiovascular disease and 40% of cancers. In total, smoking is directly responsible for one out of every five deaths in the US - the leading cause of preventable death in our country. As such a substantial cause of death and disease, the consistency of intervention among patients who smoke warrants consistent measurement via the HEDIS/CAHPS measures for all types of health plans.

While NCQA proposes to maintain the two other HEDIS/CAHPS Smoking and Tobacco Use Cessation measures (“discussing cessation medications” and “discussing cessation strategies”), critical reporting information will be lost if the “Advising all smokers to quit” piece of the measure is retired. All smokers are not ready to quit and will not be captured by the measure components assessing only those who received treatment. ***For smokers not yet ready to quit and accept counseling and medication, it is critical to advise them to quit*** and, ideally, to provide some motivational information. Only with the “advising all smokers to quit” measure can we capture accurately the proportion of smokers visiting outpatient clinics who receive some form of tobacco use intervention.

**The American Lung Association urges the NCQA to maintain all components of the existing Smoking and Tobacco Use Cessation measure including Advising Smokers to Quit.**