

Tobacco Cessation Coverage The Veterans Health Administration (VA)

What is the Veterans Health Administration (VA)?

The Veterans Health Administration, or VA, provides healthcare coverage for veterans. Most veterans that have served in active duty military service and were separated from the military under any condition except dishonorable are eligible for VA Health Care.¹ A complete list of qualifications is available [here](#).

VA Health Care is the largest integrated health system in the United States. Its medical benefit includes primary, preventative and specialty care. Additionally, it covers prescription drugs, mental health, home health, extended care, medical equipment and more. Most veterans qualify for coverage without cost-sharing; however, some veterans have co-pays.²

Tobacco Cessation and VA Healthcare:

Veterans have historically smoked at higher rates than the civilian population. Military veterans currently smoke at a rate 29.2 percent³ as opposed to the general population that smoke at a rate of 15.1** percent.⁴ When breaking down veterans into subgroups, current use of any tobacco products was even higher among individuals who: are aged 18–25 years (56.8%), were living in poverty (53.7%), who reported serious psychological distress (48.2 percent), whose annual family income was <\$20,000 (44.3%), persons who had not completed high school (37.9%), and Hispanics (34.0%).⁵ Quitting smoking improves health at all ages and saves both lives and money. The VA offers some tobacco cessation benefits to help veterans quit.



Counseling

- VA Health Care currently covers all three forms of tobacco cessation counseling.
- Phone Counseling (1-800-QUIT-VET)⁶
- Individual Counseling
- Group Counseling

Medication Coverage

- VA Health Care currently covers some tobacco cessation medications.⁷ They include Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) Gum, NRT Patch, NRT Lozenge, Bupropion and Varenicline (Chantix).⁸
 - o NRT Gum, NRT Patch, NRT Lozenge, and Bupropion are all considered first line treatments either when taken on their own or as part of a combination therapy
 - o Varenicline is available, but the barrier of stepped therapy exists. Stepped therapy means that a patient cannot be prescribed a medication until they have had an unsuccessful quit attempt with a first line treatment.

Comprehensive Cessation Benefit:

Seven Medications:

NRT Gum (OTC*) | NRT Patch (OTC)
NRT Lozenge (OTC) | NRT Inhaler
NRT Nasal Spray | Bupropion / Zyban®
Varenicline (Chantix®)

Three Forms of Counseling:

Individual | Group | Phone

¹<https://www.va.gov/HEALTHBENEFITS/apply/veterans.asp>

²https://www.va.gov/HEALTHBENEFITS/resources/priority_groups.asp

*Over the Counter or OTC; meaning a patient does not need a prescription to purchase the medication.

³<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/67/wr/mm6701a2.htm>

⁴https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/adult_data/cig_smoking/index.htm

⁵<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/67/wr/mm6701a2.htm>

⁶<https://www.publichealth.va.gov/smoking/professionals/treatment/index.asp>

⁷https://www.publichealth.va.gov/docs/smoking/cessationguidelinepart2_508.pdf

⁸<https://www.publichealth.va.gov/smoking/quit/medications.asp>

**this number includes both the general public, military members, and veterans

However, in order for the health plan to cover the cost a prescription must be written, even for OTC medications.