

Tobacco Cessation Coverage The Veterans Health Administration (VA)

What is the Veterans Health Administration (VA)?

The Veterans Health Administration is a provider of health care for approximately 9 million 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 21.6 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 provides some tobacco cessation treatment to help smokers quit.



Counseling

- VA Health Care currently covers all three forms of tobacco cessation counseling.
- Phone Counseling (1-855-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 it is considered a second line treatment. A veteran needs to have the history of a previous quit attempt with one of the other medications before being prescribed varenicline.

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

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>

*Over the Counter or OTC; meaning a patient does not need a prescription to purchase the medication. However, in order for the health plan to cover the cost a prescription must be written, even for OTC medications.

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