

Insights on Employers' Attitudes and Perceptions of the Value of Smoking Cessation



OVERVIEW

Smoking cessation treatment is one of the most cost-effective health care benefits available, tied with aspirin therapy and childhood immunizations, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).¹ While employers consider smoking a priority health issue, few offer the comprehensive benefits recommended by the CDC and the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, according to a survey by the National Business Group on Health.²

The Business Group conducted the survey of 506 employers (253 with 10,000 or more employees and 253 with between 1,000 and 9,999 employees) to explore employers' understanding and perceptions of the business impact of smoking, as well as the barriers to implementing comprehensive smoking cessation benefits. Below are key survey findings, as well as other important facts and figures.

CDC Recommended Smoking Cessation Benefit

- 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 smoking cessation attempts per year
- Eliminate or minimize co-pays or deductibles for counseling and medications³

SMOKING CESSATION: A HEALTH PRIORITY

Employers recognize smoking as a health priority and consider smoking cessation benefits a valuable way to help employees quit.

- The majority (51 percent) of employers ranked smoking as one of the greatest priority health issues facing their companies, second only to obesity (54 percent)²
- About 75 percent of employer survey respondents said that they believed providing smoking cessation benefits can help improve the health of their employees (74 percent) and decrease health care costs (74 percent)²
- 70 percent of employers viewed offering smoking cessation benefits as the "most valuable" way to encourage employees to quit smoking. Furthermore, 85 percent agreed that providing smoking cessation benefits can be cost-effective for their companies²

Most employers are motivated to offer smoking cessation benefits due to their potential to reduce health care costs.

- The potential to reduce health care costs motivates employers to provide employees with smoking cessation benefits (82 percent) more than other business outcomes, including increased productivity (57 percent), reduced absenteeism (46 percent) and reduced life insurance costs (46 percent)²

SMOKING CESSATION COVERAGE: EMPLOYER PERCEPTIONS AND BENEFITS

The majority of employers recognize that smoking is more than just a habit; however, there are still many who consider it a lifestyle choice.

- A full 79 percent of employers classify cigarette smoking as an addiction. At the same time, slightly more than half of employers (52 percent) believe that cigarette smoking is a lifestyle choice, and 30 percent of employers felt that quitting smoking was the sole responsibility of the employee²
- Only 13 percent classify smoking as a relapsing medical condition²
 - o Notably, large employers were more likely than small employers to classify smoking as a relapsing medical condition (18 percent vs. 8 percent)²

Employers understand the value of offering their employees CDC-recommended smoking cessation benefits.

- 96 percent of employers said they believe that it is beneficial to provide employees with all of the components of a comprehensive smoking cessation benefit as outlined by the CDC²
- 93 percent said that they believe the CDC guidelines would be effective in helping employees to quit smoking if implemented and, in addition, 74 percent believed that their company would be likely to provide their employees with all of the components of a smoking cessation benefit as outlined by the CDC²

However, few employers are doing enough to help their employees quit smoking.

- Although employers expressed interest in providing comprehensive benefits, the survey showed that only two percent of employers actually currently provide the comprehensive smoking cessation benefit recommended by the CDC²
- Employers are most likely to offer only two of five CDC-recommended smoking cessation benefits components²
- Nineteen percent of employers offer none of the CDC components²

FINANCIAL IMPACT OF SMOKING: EMPLOYERS REMAIN UNCERTAIN

Few employers know how much smoking employees cost their businesses, but they report that overall they are doing more to help employees quit than in previous years.

- When asked to estimate an adult smoker's average excess medical costs to the employer, 43 percent responded that they don't know and 15 percent estimated the cost at less than \$1,000²
- 93 percent said they are doing more to encourage employees to quit smoking this year than in the previous year²

A 1999 study shows the economic burden of smoking to be approximately \$1,623 in excess medical expenses per smoking employee, plus an additional \$1,760 in lost productivity per smoking employee due to smoking and smoking-related illnesses⁴

PRACTICAL TOOLS AND GUIDANCE

A variety of tools and resources are available to employers to help them adopt a systematic approach to helping their employees quit smoking.

- To provide employers with practical guidance for implementing smoking cessation benefits, the Business Group has launched a new Web site, available at www.businessgrouphealth.org, produced with input and support from the CDC
- Alternatively, the Business Group's *Purchaser's Guide to Clinical Preventive Services* provides employers with a practical, step-by-step tool for implementing smoking cessation (and other preventive) benefits. The Purchaser's Guide is available at <http://www.businessgrouphealth.org>

ABOUT THE SURVEY

The online survey, which was conducted by StrategyOne, an applied research consulting firm, and fielded by Harris Interactive Service Bureau, polled 506 employers with more than 1,000 employees – 253 with fewer than 10,000 employees and 253 with 10,000 employees or more, including 56 employers with more than 100,000 employees. Interviews were conducted from August 31, 2007, through September 7, 2007. The survey has a margin of error of plus or minus 4.4 percent at the 95 percent level of confidence, which means that in 95 out of 100 times that a sample of this size is drawn, the results would not vary by more than 4.4 percentage points in either direction.

¹ Center for Prevention and Health Services. Reducing the Burden of Smoking on Employee Health and Productivity. Washington, DC: National Business Group on Health; 2003.

² Insights on Employers' Attitudes and Perceptions of the Value of Smoking Cessation. National Business Group on Health (2007).

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Coverage for Tobacco Use Cessation Treatment: Why, What, and How. Available at: http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/quit_smoking/cessation/00_pdfs/ReimbursementBrochureFull.pdf. Accessed October 11, 2007.

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Annual smoking-attributable mortality, years of potential life lost, and economic costs – United States, 1995-1999. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report 2002;51(14):300-03. American Cancer Society.