



California Tobacco Control Alliance

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ANTI-TOBACCO GROUP LAUNCHES CAMPAIGN URGING HEALTH PLANS TO IMPROVE STOP-SMOKING BENEFITS

(Sacramento, CA) The California Tobacco Control Alliance (Alliance) today launched a new statewide campaign that encourages health plans to include stop smoking services and treatments in basic health benefits packages sold in the state. The *Smoking Cessation Benefits Everyone* campaign helps consumers, businesses and health plans recognize the toll that tobacco takes on the current health care system and offers an opportunity to take action.

The first phase of the campaign kicks off with a new web site that goes live today, www.cessationbenefitseveryone.org. At the site, Californians can register their support for increasing coverage of smoking cessation services. Site visitors can sign a letter addressed to health care leaders that encourages health plans to include the services in basic health benefits.

“Californians consistently support efforts to reduce smoking and tobacco use in the state,” said Traci Verardo, Executive Director of the Alliance. “Decades of prevention and education programs have convinced the public about the harms of tobacco use. This campaign gives Californians a new opportunity to show their support for reducing tobacco use and addressing rising health care costs by increasing coverage of cessation services.”

Use of cessation services, including medications and counseling, have been shown to as much as double or triple smokers’ chances of successfully quitting. Approximately 17 percent of California adults smoke, representing more than four million. At the same time, 75 percent of all smokers indicate they would like to quit, and over 60 percent attempt to quit each year.

In a November 2003 poll of Californians with health insurance, 71 percent agreed that health insurance companies should include treatments for quitting smoking as part of standard

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coverage. Additionally, 61 percent agreed that smoking costs society so much that it's worth it to pay a little more for health insurance to cover medicine and treatment.

Coverage for comprehensive services to stop smoking varies widely among the state's health plans. Providing standard coverage across all health plans would alleviate the financial burden of treating long term tobacco-related diseases and illnesses. As of 1999, direct medical costs related to smoking in California were more than \$8.6 billion. Research has shown that smoking-related medical costs account for six to twelve percent of all health care expenditures. An industry-wide effort to cover services would provide consistent access to smokers who change health plans, as well as lessen health plan concerns about adverse risk selection.

"The health care community knows first hand the immense medical and financial impacts that smoking causes on the health care system," said Verardo. "Providing better access to cessation services that effectively help smokers quit is the next big step toward reducing the costs of smoking and improving health for all Californians. We look forward to continuing to work with leaders in the state's health care community to make that vision a reality."

By mobilizing support from consumers, health care providers and employers, the ***Smoking Cessation Benefits Everyone*** campaign will demonstrate that market demand for cessation coverage exists. In March, the campaign will launch an employer-focused strategy to capitalize on the role of businesses in cessation benefits design and implementation. Results from the November poll indicated that 72 percent of Californians agree that employers should offer health insurance to their employees that covers cessation benefits.

For additional information on the ***Smoking Cessation Benefits Everyone*** campaign, visit www.cessationbenefitseveryone.org.

The California Tobacco Control Alliance, created in 1997, provides innovative statewide leadership, in collaboration with traditional and nontraditional partners, to influence and advance tobacco control in California. As a statewide resource and collaborative forum for traditional tobacco control organizations, as well as new public and private partners, the Alliance provides tobacco policy leadership through coordination, communication and advocacy. For additional information, visit www.tobaccofreealliance.org.