

Partnerships Improve Access to Tobacco Cessation Services for Arizonans with Mental Illness

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Summary

Partnering with organizations in the public mental health system to achieve health systems change is an effective way to promote consistent assessment and treatment of tobacco dependence among low income tobacco users with mental illness. Although referred individuals can be difficult to reach, nearly half of those reached enrolled in services and nearly three quarters were highly motivated to quit within a month. Clients in this population face significant environmental, structural and health-related barriers to quitting; thus continued provision of targeted services is critical to sustaining successful outcomes.

Challenge

Arizona is committed to improving health and reducing tobacco-related health disparities, particularly among low income individuals with mental illness. National data suggest adults with mental illness smoke at significantly higher rates than those without mental illness, and nearly half (48%) of adults with mental illness living below the poverty level smoke. Smoking prevalence rates are even higher among those diagnosed with a serious mental illness (e.g. schizophrenia, bipolar disorder). Data from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (2011, 2012) suggest approximately 19% of adults in Arizona have any mental illness and 5% of adults have serious mental illness. Although adult tobacco use rates in Arizona are below the national average (16.3% vs. 17.8%), disparities among low income individuals with mental illness – particularly serious mental illness – remain a significant concern.

Solution

In an effort to reduce health disparities related to tobacco use, the Arizona Department of Health Services Bureau of Tobacco and Chronic Disease, in partnership with the Arizona Smokers' Helpline (ASHLine), is utilizing a portion of Prevention and Public Health Fund (PPHF) support over a four year period to target disparate populations and increase access to quitline services. In Year 1, ASHLine focused outreach efforts within the public mental health system, utilizing experienced Community Development Specialists to target nine service provider networks serving low income individuals to provide technical assistance promoting health systems change, and to educate provider networks on the importance of addressing tobacco use and referring tobacco users with mental illness to evidence-based treatment.



Your Involvement is Key

Tobacco use is the leading avoidable cause of sickness and death in the United States and quitting tobacco is one of the single most important things a person can do to protect their health. You can get involved in supporting people who want to quit – it can be as easy as linking them to a local quitline. Quitlines typically provide a combination of evidence-based behavioral support and medication assistance. Many tobacco users think about quitting, but few can quit on their own without support. For more information on quitting in Arizona, visit www.ashline.org or call 1-800-55-66-222.

Results

At the end of Year 1, ASHLine received over 1,000 referrals from targeted providers. Reaching referred clients in this population can be challenging. Only 1 in 4 referrals resulted in an enrollment; however, nearly half (43%) of individuals ASHLine was able to successfully reach enrolled in services. On average, clients who enrolled were middle-aged, low income and reported being heavy smokers. A majority (60%) had at least one co-existing chronic health condition (e.g. hypertension, cardiovascular disease, diabetes), and over half (62%) lived with another smoker – a significant barrier in adopting smoking behavior change. Despite these challenges, clients who enrolled were highly motivated to quit (73% reported intent to do so within 30 days). Our results confirm this is a high-risk population of low income, underserved individuals with increased health risks (due to tobacco use and chronic health conditions) who require ongoing, targeted efforts to support smoking behavior change.

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"ASHLine has benefited CODAC Behavioral Health Services in many ways. ASHLine comes out monthly to provide training on how to make referrals to ASHLine services. For CODAC clients, ASHLine is a valuable resource as many persons with serious mental illness and behavioral health issues smoke."

- Marta McKenna

Sustainable Success

ASHLine will continue to target organizations serving populations disproportionately affected by tobacco use. In Years 2-4 efforts will expand to include Federally Qualified Community Health Centers, as well as providers serving priority populations identified by the Arizona Department of Health Services (e.g. lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender). In addition, ASHLine's clinical team will improve client services by completing a suite of specialized protocols to support the provision of tailored services for target populations (e.g. pregnant and postpartum women, youth). The development of a multi-modal coaching platform – including mobile health applications – will ensure expanded services are available for Arizonans seeking tobacco cessation support. These efforts will contribute to the goal of enhancing quitline capacity and promoting sustainability.