

Breathe Easy Coalition's Recognition Program Encourages Maine Hospitals and Colleges to Adopt Tobacco-Free Best Practices

Maine's Breathe Easy Coalition (BEC) established its Gold Star Standards of Excellence program in 2009 to recognize colleges and hospitals in Maine for adhering to tobacco control and cessation best practices, which are updated each year for both colleges and hospitals. Since its founding, the program has seen an increase in the number of colleges and hospitals achieving the program standards, and has also seen recognized institutions embrace more of its tobacco best practices, resulting in an improvement of tobacco policy in colleges, universities, and hospitals throughout Maine.

In 2009, Maine's Breathe Easy Coalition (a contractor of Maine CDC – Partnership for a Tobacco-Free Maine also supported by the Maine Department of Health and Human Services) was tasked with systematically engaging Maine colleges and hospitals in the area of tobacco control. To increase these institutions' adherence to tobacco control best practices, BEC started the Gold Star Standards of Excellence program, which rewards and publicly recognizes colleges and hospitals for voluntarily adopting tobacco control best practices. Each year, a coalition of public health stakeholders convened by BEC issues two sets of 10 tobacco best practices—one set for colleges and universities, and another set for hospitals—that the institutions are able to voluntarily implement. Recognizing the institutions for their tobacco control efforts, and publicizing this recognition through branding and earned media, have led to improved adoption of tobacco control best practices by colleges and hospitals across Maine.

Steps Taken:

- Each year since 2010, BEC has issued two lists of 10 tobacco control best practices—[one set for colleges](#) and [one set for hospitals](#). The best practices include instituting a comprehensive tobacco-free policy with signage in place for both college campuses and hospitals, as well as screening patients for tobacco dependence in hospitals. Adopting six or seven best practices earns an institution a bronze recognition, adopting eight or nine earns an institution a silver recognition, and adopting all 10 best practices earns an institution a gold level recognition. Recognition must be earned each year.
- Setting the 10 best practices each year is the responsibility of a coalition of 60-70 public health stakeholders convened by BEC quarterly to discuss initiatives. Best practices are adapted from the [Community Guide](#), the [50th Anniversary Surgeon General's report](#), and the [Public Health](#)

- Maine is home to 26 colleges and universities and 39 hospitals, each with varying tobacco control and cessation policies.
- Since 2011, the number of Maine colleges and universities recognized by the Gold Star Standards of Excellence program has increased from seven to 11, or 42.3 percent of all Maine colleges.
- Since 2010, the number of recognized hospitals in Maine has increased from 14 to 33, which represents 84.6 percent of all Maine hospitals.

State Success Story



[Service Clinical Practice Guideline](#). When starting work with colleges and hospitals, BEC involved stakeholders from the institutions (such as the New England College Association and representatives from Maine hospital systems) to establish realistic and meaningful standards of tobacco control and cessation.

- BEC holds local celebrations each year to publicize the Gold Star Standards of Excellence and publicly recognizes the institutions participating in that program. They invite press to these events and provide the media with photos and press releases (both statewide and for each college and hospital) to increase the visibility of their recognition program to the community. In addition, BEC uses peer influence to encourage more institutions to sign on. Statewide press releases detail the participating institutions and emphasize the general importance of tobacco control, whereas press releases prepared for individual colleges and hospitals highlight the steps they are taking to address tobacco use and exposure to secondhand smoke.

Results:

- In 2011, BEC recognized seven Maine colleges (26.9% of all colleges) through the Gold Star Standards of Excellence Recognition Program, with one college recognized at the Gold Level for adhering to all published standards. As of April 2016, 11 colleges (42.3%) are participating, including the University of Maine, with 10 of those colleges recognized at the Gold Level.
- In 2010, 14 Maine hospitals (45.2% of Maine's hospitals) participated in the Gold Star Standards of Excellence Recognition Program, with six being recognized at the Gold Level. As of April 2016, 33 hospitals are participating (84.6%), and the Breathe Easy Coalition recognizes 26 of those hospitals at the Gold Level.
- Establishing bronze, silver, and gold levels of recognition have increased buy-in by encouraging Maine colleges and hospitals to adopt more of the tobacco best practices over time and increase their level of recognition. For example, MaineHealth, the state's largest hospital system, mandated that all of their hospitals be recognized. They evolved to require all of their hospitals to reach the silver or gold level. Now they require that all hospitals in the system achieve the gold level of recognition.
- Of the 33 participating hospitals, 30 currently screen patients for tobacco dependence and refer patients as appropriate to internal tobacco cessation programs or to the [Maine Tobacco HelpLine](#). Depending on hospital size and structure, some participating hospitals have elected to designate a clinician or tobacco treatment specialist to screen and refer patients who are tobacco users.

Lessons Learned:

- Recognizing colleges and hospitals at bronze, silver, and gold levels encouraged those institutions to increase their adherence to tobacco best practices. Competition between different colleges and hospitals inspired more of these organizations to pursue recognition and then increase their level of recognition, thus increasing adoption to the established standards.
- Publicizing membership in the Gold Star Standards of Excellence Recognition Program through public recognition events with earned media opportunities increased awareness of colleges and hospitals that go tobacco-free.

State Success Story



- Making participation easy helps encourage colleges and hospitals to participate in the program and improve adherence to tobacco control best practices. Application for the Gold Star Standards of Excellence Recognition Program is available in both paper form and online. Once standards are made available, institutions have almost a full year to apply for recognition and report how they are adhering to the 10 best practices for that given year.
- Inviting college and hospital stakeholders to participate in the process of establishing the recognition standards for tobacco control increased buy-in. For example, the Maine Hospital Association published a [position statement](#) encouraging all Maine hospitals to implement smoke-free policies and other Gold Star Standards of Excellence best practices.

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