

### **Stand-Up Insurance Coverage of Tobacco Cessation Programs Starts with Oregon**

*Oregon, a state with tobacco-free state properties, has provided 100 percent coverage and barrier-free tobacco cessation support for its state and university employees and their dependents since 2008.*

Oregon's Public Employees' Benefit Board (PEBB) has provided comprehensive, no cost tobacco cessation coverage to state agency and university system employees since 2008. The coverage extends to covered spouses and dependents and includes access to counseling, nicotine replacement therapies and other cessation medications. PEBB is a joint labor-management board with eight voting members appointed by Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber. The board has for many years sought to provide evidence-based benefits that support prevention and encourage member engagement and healthy behaviors.

Gov. Kitzhaber has been a strong champion of tobacco prevention and education. In addition to supporting robust cessation benefits, he passed an executive order on August 2, 2012, requiring state agencies to implement a tobacco-free campus policy.<sup>1</sup> Oregon is only one of two states in the country to pass a tobacco-free state properties executive order.

#### **Steps Taken:**

To create a culture of health in worksites, employers can design and promote robust benefits, as well as provide a supportive environment for employees to take action for their health. Oregon state agencies employ approximately 33,000 people, of which 5.6 percent are current tobacco users.<sup>2</sup> To help create a culture of health, the Oregon Public Health Division supports the tobacco-free state properties initiative by promoting PEBB's cessation benefit and providing technical assistance to state agencies as they implement tobacco-free properties. A strong collaborative partnership between the Public Health Division and PEBB is a key driver to success.

Another key to success is PEBB's ability to use purchasing power to partner effectively with the insurance carriers to reduce or eliminate barriers to services that are evidence-based, focused on prevention, and help members start making changes to improve their lifestyles and reduce health risks. Partnership with experts in public health helped define key program components and suggested innovative ways to communicate to target audiences.

#### **Results:**

All PEBB members (state employees and dependents) have access to fully-covered, evidence-based tobacco cessation services under their medical plan. Services include no-cost nicotine replacement products or patches, one-on-one coaching sessions with a quit coach, and a quit guide to help users through the process, and other cessation medications at no-cost where appropriate.

- Tobacco use is the number one preventable cause of death in Oregon, where more than 22 percent of all deaths can be attributed to tobacco use.
- The roughly 5.6 percent of state employees who smoke cost the state more than \$8 million each year.
- Smokers cost employers an estimated \$4,640 annually in lost productivity and direct medical expenditures.



## Worksite Wellness Initiatives in State Agencies: Oregon

In 2012, enrollment was 294 employees. Enrollment in the program has steadily declined since 2008, when it reached its peak with 900 employees. During peak enrollment (2008-2009), Oregon began implementing barrier-free coverage that included all tobacco cessation medications, nicotine replacement therapy, and other products and services. Additionally, the Oregon Public Health Division began to promote this benefit more broadly as worksites began to prepare for implementing the tobacco-free policies.

Despite the decrease in enrollment, the state has seen an increase in the number of people reporting quitting. In 2008, the quit rate was 42.7 percent. In 2012, the quit rate was 57.8 percent. Although no formal evaluation has been conducted to determine the reasons why there has been a decrease in enrollment and increase in quit rate, some theories are:

- The tobacco-free campus initiative motivated employees to quit who had previously contemplated quitting, leaving a small cohort of tobacco users.
- Remaining tobacco users reach a stage of readiness to attempt cessation on their own.
- Employees utilize health plan coaching programs or other online resources that offer cessation support.

### **Lessons Learned:**

There are several lessons learned and best practices other states can leverage as a result of Oregon's efforts and commitment to comprehensive tobacco prevention and education.

- Obtain high-level leadership support. In Oregon, the governor endorsed efforts to implement tobacco-free worksites, becoming one of two states to pass a tobacco-free state properties executive order. This provided state agencies an opportunity to protect people from secondhand smoke and help those trying to quit tobacco. PEBB has provided innovative leadership in prioritizing preventive benefits.
- Establish key partnerships. The partnership between public health and PEBB has helped create a culture of health in state agencies by working together to support employees.
- Review and evaluate data. To quantify the value of the program and to evaluate its success, PEBB reviews participation and quit rate reports. The Public Health Division administers a behavioral risk factor survey to understand the health of the whole population. PEBB and public health can demonstrate tobacco use rate among employees is lower than the general population statewide. Tobacco-free campuses and property not only encourage tobacco users to quit, but also protect employees, clients, and visitors from exposure to the toxins in secondhand smoke.

### **For more information:**

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<sup>1</sup> Office of the Governor, State of Oregon. "Executive Order 12-13 – Tobacco Free Properties." Available at [http://www.oregon.gov/gov/docs/executive\\_orders/eo\\_12-13.pdf](http://www.oregon.gov/gov/docs/executive_orders/eo_12-13.pdf). Accessed 5-21-2013.

<sup>2</sup> Oregon Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention. 2013. BRFSS 2012 Survey of State Employees Report. Available at [http://www.oregon.gov/DAS/PEBB/2013Benefits/OHA9955PEBB\\_final.pdf](http://www.oregon.gov/DAS/PEBB/2013Benefits/OHA9955PEBB_final.pdf).