

## **North Carolina Tobacco Use Quitline Program Overview**

### **Background**

Tobacco use is the #1 cause of preventable death in the United States, killing more than 440,000 Americans each year. It is also the top cause of preventable death in North Carolina, and is a leading cause for deadly cancers and debilitating illnesses including: lung cancer, heart disease, emphysema, asthma, blindness, leukemia and cancers of the throat, bladder, larynx, kidney, pancreas, cervix and many more. Quitting tobacco is the single most important thing an individual can do to prolong their life. And while studies show that most tobacco users *want to quit*, many are unable to overcome their addiction.

Telephone “quitlines” help tobacco users quit their addiction by offering advice, support and referrals to local cessation resources. Scientific evidence shows that quitlines are effective tools to help tobacco users quit. This became evident in 2004, when US Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy G. Thompson announced the launch of a national quitline number (1-800-QUIT-NOW), to serve as a single access point for a network of state and nationally-funded tobacco cessation Quitlines. Callers are automatically routed to a state quitline, if one exists in their state. If no state-funded quitline exists, calls are directed to the National Cancer Institute (NCI) quitline. As part of the network, HHS’ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provided funding to 49 states to either enhance their existing quitline or to create one. North Carolina’s DHHS, Tobacco Control and Prevention Branch (TPCB) received such funding

### **Objective**

The NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund (HWTF) has funded a statewide teen tobacco prevention and cessation initiative since 2002. Since that time, HWTF has been exploring the viability of implementing a statewide teen quitline to provide comprehensive cessation services to its target population. Empirical studies currently being conducted on youth-focused quitlines in Utah and California show that, “the efficacy of telephone counseling for teen and college-aged smokers is promising,” according to Dr. Shu-Hong Zhu, a leading researcher on this subject. Based on these positive reports, in February 2005 HWTF allocated \$1.2 million to fund a statewide youth quitline. Since TPCB was also in the process of implementing a statewide quitline using the CDC funds mentioned above, HWTF and TPCB decided to partner on this project in order to optimize resources. TPCB will pay for adult callers while HWTF funding will support the following:

- All callers aged 24 years or younger
- All callers who are identified as school or childcare employees
- All callers who live with and/or are the primary caregiver of a child under the age of 18, and thus are a role model for children/youth

### **Program**

HWTF and TPCB issued a joint Request for Applications to potential vendors across the country to operate a toll-free, proactive statewide tobacco use quitline capable of addressing the cessation needs of adult, young adult and teen tobacco users. A nationally reputed quitline vendor, Free &

Clear, Inc. was selected through this process to provide quitline services. Free & Clear currently operates quitlines in 15 other states including Utah, which funds the only youth-oriented quitline in the country.

The state funded quitline service is now available at **1-800-QUIT-NOW** and provides proactive cessation information and support in both English and Spanish. The proactive nature of this service means that quitline specialists can call the tobacco user back to answer questions and address concerns. The service is delivered by trained tobacco specialists who will provide up to four callbacks to quitline users to check on their progress and to provide additional guidance. Callers may request information about quitting for themselves, a friend or family member.

The quitline, which is available from 8 AM until Midnight 7 days per week, provides free cessation services for all NC residents including youth and adults of all ages based on availability of funds.

### **Quitline Promotional Efforts**

Because North Carolina's plans to promote a tobacco use quitline to youth are largely unprecedented in the United States, HWTF and other subject matter experts agreed that formative research was required to identify the messages and media for communicating with youth and young adult populations about the availability of cessation services. HWTF entered into a contract with experts at the UNC School of Public Health to conduct such research. UNC's marketing study has recently been completed, and its results will shape future messaging themes for a mass media campaign and an informational website targeting NC youth, along with HWTF's traditional grassroots approach of grantee support.

During this first year of the quitline, however, HWTF has focused its marketing efforts on a statewide campaign to educate health care providers across the state about the quitline, and encourage them to utilize an innovative fax-referral service. The fax-referral service allows health care providers and HWTF local tobacco prevention and cessation grantees to gauge a person's interest in quitting the use of tobacco within 30 days. Based on their consent, the provider can fax the tobacco user's contact information directly to the quitline, where a trained tobacco specialist will proactively make the initial contact. Once this connection has been made, the tobacco user can begin receiving the information and support services. In February and March 2006, HWTF sent informational packets to more than 6,000 North Carolina physicians to publicize Quitline NC.

And while 2005 Youth Tobacco Survey data shows tobacco use among NC youth appears to be declining overall, tobacco use rates among college-aged youth are of grave concern. In fact, studies show that this demographic is the *only* group in the nation where tobacco use is actually increasing. In order to address this growing problem, HWTF awarded more than \$1.6 million for 20 college-based tobacco use prevention and cessation projects targeting the promotion of smoke-free campus environments. Promoting 1-800-QUIT-NOW is a top priority for all grantees.

More information about Quitline NC can be found at [www.QuitlineNC.com](http://www.QuitlineNC.com).