
Tobacco Free Mass

Massachusetts Coalition for a Healthy Future

September 13, 2021

The Honorable Cindy F. Friedman, Chair
The Honorable John J. Lawn, Jr., Chair
Joint Committee on Health Care Financing
State House Room 236
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chairwoman Friedman and Chairman Lawn,

Tobacco Free Mass strongly supports ***HB 1245 and SB 792: An Act providing Medicaid coverage for tobacco cessation programs***. These important bills have been filed by Representative Christine P. Barber and Senator Jason M. Lewis.

Despite progress we have made here in Massachusetts and across the country, cigarette smoking continues to be the leading cause of preventable disease and death in the United States, claiming over 400,000 lives prematurely every year.ⁱ Smoking not only takes the lives of those who use tobacco, but also those who are exposed to secondhand smoke. Smokeless tobacco has been linked to greater incidence of fatal heart attacks and strokes.ⁱⁱ The bottom line is that no tobacco product is safe to use. Smoking costs the U.S. economy approximately \$300 billion each year, including \$133 to \$176 billion for direct medical costs and \$151 billion for lost productivity related to premature death.ⁱⁱⁱ

There are many factors that impact whether people smoke--and how likely they are to be able to quit. These factors include environment, stress, tobacco industry targeting, mental health status, poverty, and access to cessation services and medicines.

Because they are more likely to be exposed to many of the negative factors, adults who are insured by MassHealth are **twice as likely to smoke** (20.5%) than privately insured adults in Massachusetts (10%).^{iv} In 2019, the percentage of smokers insured by MassHealth who self-reported poor mental health was **37.7%**.^v To best reach these smokers, it's essential to let behavioral health providers provide smoking cessation services through MassHealth. Expanding the types of trusted health providers who can be reimbursed for helping smokers and tobacco users quit will help people receive help and ongoing support from trusted professionals who they may see on a more regular basis.

American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network | American Heart Association | American Lung Association | Association for Behavioral Healthcare | Bay State Community Services | Berkshire AHEC | Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts | Boston Public Health Commission | Dana Farber Cancer Institute | Gandara Center | Greater Lawrence Family Health Center | Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts | Health Resources in Action | Institute for Health and Recovery | Massachusetts Academy of Family Physicians | Massachusetts Association of Health Boards | Massachusetts Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics | Massachusetts Dental Society | Massachusetts Health and Hospital Association | Massachusetts Health Officers Association | Massachusetts Medical Society | Massachusetts Medical Society Alliance | Massachusetts Municipal Association | Mercy Medical Center | MetroWest Health Foundation | MGH Community Health Associates | Partners Health Care | Public Health Advocacy Institute | UMass Center for Tobacco Treatment Research & Training | UMass Memorial Health Care

PO Box 380944 | Cambridge, MA 02238 | tobaccofreema.org

FDA approved tobacco cessation treatment is an evidence-based means to help tobacco users quit. It has also proven to be highly cost-effective, even though it is very difficult for people to quit this deadly, addictive habit.^{vi} There is a strong relationship between the length of time patients have in behavior counseling sessions, the amount of time they are able to spend with their health care providers and successful treatment outcomes.^{vii}

In July 2006, the landmark Massachusetts health care reform law mandated tobacco cessation coverage for the Massachusetts Medicaid population. Upon implementation of the benefit, MassHealth subscribers were allowed two 90-day courses per year of FDA-approved medications for smoking cessation, including over-the-counter medications like nicotine replacement therapy, and up to 16 individual or group counseling sessions. Within the first two years of implementation, over 70,000 MassHealth recipients used the benefit, and the smoking rate declined from 38% to 28%.^{viii} There was also a decline in the utilization of other costly healthcare services (38% decrease in hospitalizations for heart attacks, a 17% drop in emergency room and clinic visits due to asthma, and a 17% drop in claims for adverse maternal birth complications, including pre-term labor).^{ix}

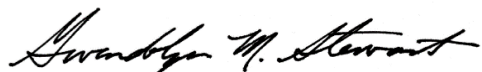
Additional research with the program showed that the comprehensive coverage led to reduced hospitalizations for heart attacks and a net savings of \$10.5 million, or a \$3.07 return on investment for every dollar spent.^x Savings will likely continue to increase as time goes on and the impact of quitting in this population increases.

While the success of the ongoing MassHealth, comprehensive cessation benefit has been well documented, it can limit who can be reimbursed for providing the recommended counseling. The original language in Chapter 58 provides for “counseling by a physician, certified tobacco-use cessation counselor, or other qualified clinician”. To expand the number of patients being provided the counseling part of the approved treatments, HB 1245 and SB 792 would allow for trained and certified dentists, behavioral health counselors and mental health counselors to be reimbursed as well.

In 2019 the Massachusetts legislature passed a first-in-the-nation law prohibiting the sale of all flavored tobacco products in the Commonwealth. The law also codified the MassHealth benefit and expanded coverage to all insurance, including private insurance and the Group Insurance Commission (GIC). HB 1245 and SB 792 would continue this vital work by expanding the number of certified practitioners available to provide evidence-based counseling for those seeking assistance in quitting tobacco use.

I respectfully ask that you report HB 1245 and SB 792 favorably out of committee.

Sincerely,



Gwendolyn Stewart, Executive Director

ⁱ Dube SR, McClave, A., James, C., Caraballo, R., Kaufmann, R., Pechacek, T. Vital signs: current cigarette smoking among adults > 18 Years – United States 2009. MMWR. September 7, 2010;59:1-6

Tobacco Free Mass

Massachusetts Coalition for a Healthy Future

-
- ⁱⁱ Piano MR, Benowitz NL, Fitzgerald GA, Corbridge S, Heath J, Hahn E, Pechacek TF, Howard G. Impact of smokeless tobacco products on cardiovascular disease: implications for policy, prevention, and treatment. *Circulation*. 2010 Oct 12;122(15):1520-44. Epub 2010 Sep 13.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Benjamin, EJ et al., Heart disease and stroke statistics – 2018 update: A report from the American Heart Association. *Circulation*. 2018; 137(12).
- ^{iv} Massachusetts Behavioral Risk Surveillance System, 2019.
- ^v Massachusetts Behavioral Risk Surveillance System, 2019.
- ^{vi} Javitz HS, Swan GE, Zbikowski SM, et al. Return on investment of different combinations of bupropion SR dose and behavioral treatment for smoking cessation in a health care setting: an employer's perspective. *Value Health*. Sep-Oct 2004;7(5):535-543.
- ^{vii} Treating tobacco use and dependence: 2008 update. In: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services PHS, ed. Rockville, MD; May 2008.
- ^{viii} Land T, Warner D, Paskowsky M, Cammaerts A, Wetherell L, et al. Medicaid Coverage for Tobacco Dependence Treatments in Massachusetts and Associated Decreases in Smoking Prevalence. *PLoS ONE*. 2010;5(3): e9770. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0009770.
- ^{ix} Land T, Warner D, Paskowsky M, Cammaerts A, Wetherell L, et al. Medicaid Coverage for Tobacco Dependence Treatments in Massachusetts and Associated Decreases in Smoking Prevalence. *PLoS ONE*. 2010;5(3): e9770. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0009770.
- ^x Land T, Rigotti NA, Levy DE, Paskowsky M, Warner D, et al. A Longitudinal Study of Medicaid Coverage for Tobacco Dependence Treatments in Massachusetts and Associated Decreases in Hospitalizations for Cardiovascular Disease. *PLoS Med*. 2010; 7(12): e1000375. doi:10.371/journal.pmed.1000375.

American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network | American Heart Association | American Lung Association | Association for Behavioral Healthcare | Bay State Community Services | Berkshire AHEC | Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts | Boston Public Health Commission | Dana Farber Cancer Institute | Gandara Center | Greater Lawrence Family Health Center | Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts | Health Resources in Action | Institute for Health and Recovery | Massachusetts Academy of Family Physicians | Massachusetts Association of Health Boards | Massachusetts Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics | Massachusetts Dental Society | Massachusetts Health and Hospital Association | Massachusetts Health Officers Association | Massachusetts Medical Society | Massachusetts Medical Society Alliance | Massachusetts Municipal Association | Mercy Medical Center | MetroWest Health Foundation | MGH Community Health Associates | Partners Health Care | Public Health Advocacy Institute | UMass Center for Tobacco Treatment Research & Training | UMass Memorial Health Care

PO Box 380944 | Cambridge, MA 02238 | tobaccofreema.org