

Promoting Quitlines during Tobacco Tax Increases

This fact sheet summarizes information gathered from 12 of the 20 states that increased their tobacco taxes in 2009 and 2010. In 2008, NAQC published [three case studies](#) and an online [policy playbook](#) to highlight the concept of promoting quitlines during policy change. Since then, many more states have increased their tobacco taxes to address budget shortfalls. Given this trend, NAQC set out to document if and how states were able to seize the opportunity to promote cessation, the resources required to maximize reach, and the impact on call volumes. These resources are intended to help states manage quitline operations and promotions during the time leading up to and immediately following policy changes.

Tax Increases for U.S. States and Territories, 2009–2010	
Arkansas on March 1, 2009 by \$0.56	New Jersey on July 1, 2009 by \$0.125
Connecticut on October 1, 2009 by \$1.00	New Mexico on July 1, 2010 by \$0.75
Delaware on August 1, 2009 by \$0.45	North Carolina on September 1, 2009 by \$0.10
Washington, D.C. on October 1, 2009 by \$0.50	Pennsylvania on November 1, 2009 by \$0.25
Florida on July 1, 2009 by \$1.00	Puerto Rico on June 1, 2009 by \$1.00
Guam on April 6, 2010 by \$2.00	Rhode Island on April 10, 2009 by \$1.00
Hawaii on July 1, 2009 by \$0.60 and July 1, 2010 by another \$0.40	Utah on July 1, 2010 by \$1.005
Kentucky on April 1, 2009 by \$0.30	Vermont on July 1, 2009 by \$0.25
Mississippi on May 15, 2009 by \$0.50	Washington on May 1, 2010 by \$1.00
New Hampshire on July 1, 2009 by \$0.45	Wisconsin on September 1, 2009 by \$0.75

States with tax increases at a level likely to impact call volumes (e.g., greater than 25% above the previous rate) and that could respond within the required time frame were contacted. Conversations revealed that few of the states implemented quitline promotions other than those already scheduled or planned during tax increases in 2009. Unlike smokefree laws, taxes often go into effect quickly allowing little time to plan additional quitline promotions. States primarily used earned media approaches given the lack of resources and adequate notice. Two of the states (Arkansas and Wisconsin) did experience significant increases in calls. In Wisconsin, combining the tax increase with a popular time of year (e.g., New Year’s), the offer of free medications, and a new online coaching feature maximized the impact of the tax increase. In Arkansas, print ads linking the tax increase with quitting and offering free nicotine replacement contributed to a positive response. In both cases adaptations were made to either the quitline budget or services to accommodate the increased demand. In Wisconsin, the quitline budget was increased, and in Arkansas, the number of counseling sessions was reduced temporarily.

The issues and circumstances impacting the level and type of quitline promotion states chose to implement were remarkably consistent across the 12 states that shared information despite the unique circumstances surrounding each tax increases, varied budgets, and different quitline service protocols. These issues included the following:

- 1) Lack of funds for additional media promotion;
- 2) Limited or fixed quitline budgets for counseling and medication;
- 3) The need to manage monthly call volumes so as not to overwhelm the quitline service provider or the

- quitline's annual budget in a short period of time;
- 4) Quitline goals related to call volumes and ensuring reach to disparate populations;
- 5) Limited planning time available between passage of the tax increase and implementation; and
- 6) Concern about other factors likely to impact call volumes (e.g., free NRT, smokefree policies, time of year, existing quitline promotions).

Establishing the impact of tax increases on call volumes continues to present challenges because of many factors that may influence call volume, such as timing in relation to the federal tax increase, the varying amounts of the tax increases, the time of year, media and other promotions, availability of free or reduced-price medication, and the level of unearned media generated by other organizations. In addition, little is known about the long-term impact of tax increases on call volumes. Because it is difficult to predict the call volumes that will naturally occur as the result of a tax increase, states may be reluctant to promote the quitline out of concern for overwhelming quitline resources.

In most cases where no promotion or no tax-specific promotion of the quitline occurred, quitline call volumes stayed flat or increased only slightly and for a very short time. Because of the limited funding situations for many quitlines, this outcome was necessary in order to continue to provide a consistent level of service to tobacco users. Yet it also represents a missed opportunity to expand the reach and impact of quitlines.

For example, in Connecticut, quitline promotion was not possible due to limited funding for both media and NRT. As a result, call volumes remained flat despite a \$1.00 tax increase per pack on October 1, 2009. Even for states that used a press release to call attention to the tax increase and the availability of the quitline (e.g., HI, KY), few large or sustained increases in call volumes occurred. It should be noted that in many cases, additional information about the timing and content of press releases and other media was unavailable. This and the many other factors mentioned above made it difficult to truly determine the impact of promotions on call volume.

To truly maximize the cessation benefit of tobacco tax increases, NAQC recommends promoting quitlines during policy change. However, this may not be feasible due to a lack of adequate funding for promotion and additional quitline services. NAQC also has recommended that states dedicate a portion of tobacco taxes to support comprehensive tobacco control programs, including quitlines. Dedicated tobacco tax revenues can provide much needed resources to help tobacco users quit at a time when many will seek assistance. More information is available online in the NAQC report, *U.S. Quitlines at a Crossroads*, at www.naquitline.org/report.

AUDIENCE

Tobacco tax increases present a significant opportunity for quitline administrators, service providers, and communications/media staff to assess quitline promotion needs and to use other states' experiences to determine the best approach for their quitline. Understanding the opportunity to capitalize on tobacco users' interest in quitting due to increased costs can help quitlines; they can adjust budgets, staffing, and promotions to handle a tax increase in a manageable and productive way to meet increased demand for cessation services.

TAKE ACTION

NAQC has described strategies and approaches for promoting the quitline, lessons learned and challenges, specific examples and information about the impact of tax increases on call volumes in the updated Policy Playbook available on the NAQC Web site at www.naquitline.org/playbook.

Because of the limited time available to plan or adjust promotions before a tax increase goes into effect, states should begin planning and networking well before an increase is passed. Assessing how quitline promotions could be adapted, what resources may be needed or reassigned and, most importantly, connecting with other organizations or departments can benefit the quitline on many levels. Quitlines should stress the importance of promoting the quitline in a way that works best for the following: available counseling, medication, and promotions budgets; service provider capacity; and quitline goals related to reach, call volumes and priority

populations. Educating policy makers, partners, media and tobacco users will certainly benefit the quitline whether a tax increase goes into effect or not.

MORE INFORMATION

- 1) NAQC Fact Sheet: Tobacco Tax Increases: Promoting Quitlines to Maximize the Cessation Benefit. Available at: <http://www.naquitline.org/?page=factsheetsetc>
- 2) NAQC Policy Playbook: A Guide to Promoting Quitlines during Policy Change. Available at: <http://www.naquitline.org/?page=playbook>
- 3) Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids fact sheets on the impact of tobacco taxes on smoking:
State information: <http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/index.php?CategoryID=18>
Federal information: <http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/index.php?CategoryID=11>
- 4) Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids press releases issued for each state tax increase summarize the likely impact of tax increase on the state's smoking prevalence, number of new smokers, and savings in health care expenditures. Available at: <http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/pressoffice/releases.php3>
- 5) Creating a Perfect Storm to Increase Consumer Demand for Wisconsin's Tobacco Quitline, American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 2010;38(3S)S343-S346. Wisconsin's experience increasing demand through policy and communications is well documented in this article, available at: <http://www.ajpm-online.net>
- 6) Consumer Demand Initiative – Innovations in Building Consumer Demand for Tobacco Cessation Products and Services. Available at: <http://www.consumer-demand.org>

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NORTH AMERICAN QUITLINE CONSORTIUM

The North American Quitline Consortium (NAQC) is a non-profit organization that strives to promote evidence-based quitline services across diverse communities in North America. By bringing quitline partners together—including state, territory, and provincial quitline administrators, researchers, quitline service providers, and national organizations in the United States, Canada, and Mexico—NAQC helps facilitate shared learning and encourages a better understanding of quitline operations, promotions, and effectiveness to improve overall quitline services.