Promoting Telephone-Based Tobacco Cessation Services: A collaborative approach to moving the promotion dialogue forward

Quitlines are telephone-based tobacco cessation services that help tobacco users quit through a variety of services, including counseling, information and self-help materials. The evidence-base for these services was established through clinical trials and recommended to health care practitioners by the U.S. Public Health Services Clinical Practice Guideline: Treating Tobacco Use and Dependence. Promotion of quitlines plays a key role in advancing the knowledge base for quitline services. Because quitlines provide a population-based service, increasing demand is critical to their effectiveness. As utilization increases, quitline costs decrease. Quitlines operate at varying budget levels, with some quitlines having scant funds for services. It is essential that promotion efforts be calibrated to match service capacity.

To better understand promotion and begin the process of creating a collaborative approach to promotion efforts, the North American Quitline Consortium (NAQC) established the NAQC Promotion Task Force (PTF) with its members and partners to help move the dialogue forward. Following is a profile of the work of the PTF, including its key activities and next steps for quitline promotion collaboration.

The NAQC Promotion Task Force

Along with its partners, NAQC has played a key role in facilitating information and strategy exchange on effective promotion approaches. As part of this effort, NAQC established the PTF in August 2005 with the following objectives:

- To develop a communication protocol to foster information exchange and deliver necessary and timely information on upcoming promotions to appropriate constituents.
- To develop a report synthesizing current knowledge about the promotion of quitlines and identify applicable action-oriented recommendations to NAQC.

Members of the PTF included American and Canadian quitline service providers, researchers and promotions experts; representatives from the state, provincial and federal funding organizations; and national and community organizations.

The PTF developed a set of 10 Core Principles for Quitline Promotion. These core principles identify goals, processes and impacts for quitline promotions. The PTF also finalized a communication protocol for NAQC to use to facilitate information exchange regarding regional and national promotion to appropriate constituents. Finally, in 2007, the Task Force completed a Knowledge Synthesis on Quitline Promotion, which informed the recommendations the PTF made to NAQC to continue its support and development of quitline promotion.

To support the development of the group’s work, the PTF developed the following working definition of promotion:

Any and all activities that quitlines undertake to help promote their desired outcome (e.g., increased awareness towards increasing call volumes) and may include coordinated or stand-alone media campaigns, promotions related to subsidized pharmacotherapies and collaboration with other programs or agencies.

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Core Principles for Quitline Promotion

The Task Force developed Core Principles for Quitline Promotion based on the recommendations of the report *Preventing 3 Million Premature Deaths, Helping 5 Million Smokers Quit: A National Action Plan for Tobacco Cessation*, which notes that an optimal quitline service providing counseling and medications may reach up to 16% of smokers each year and yield a 20% long-term successful cessation rate. This report serves as a foundation for quitline promotion activities and initiatives.

The core principles outline 10 issues that should guide quitline promotion initiatives:

1. Quitlines are working toward accomplishing these specific goals:
   a. To reach increased numbers of tobacco users each year;
   b. To provide treatment services to increased numbers of tobacco users yearly; and
   c. To achieve higher quit rates via quitline treatment.

2. Quitline promotion should be conducted commensurate with work to increase capacity and quality of quitline services. Promotion success should be determined by improvements on both sides of this equation.

3. Promotions should strive to reach all populations who need quitline services, particularly those who remain at high risk for smoking. The most valuable promotions break new ground in reaching previously underserved groups.

4. Promotions should be based on evidence-based practice. More research is needed to understand what makes quitline promotions most effective and efficacious.

5. Promotions should not be conducted in the absence of a plan to respond to increased demand with adequate resources.

6. The best promotions are sustainable and build on existing quitline infrastructure; they do no harm to current efforts and avoid duplication.

7. The value of a broad quitline network is well established, and good promotions recognize the interconnectedness of quitlines and the value of local, state, provincial, national and international initiatives. They are part of broader, comprehensive programs, and communication channels allow for information exchange among these programs.

8. Promotion efforts should be fluid and flexible to take into account the constantly shifting backdrop against which they operate and the need for continuous improvement. Promotions should be evaluated and lessons learned incorporated into future promotions.

9. Quitline promotion should strive to increase quit attempts in the population (both aided and unaided quit attempts).

10. Quitline promotion should not discourage provision of cessation treatment by the private sector.

Promotion Communication Protocol

The Task Force developed a protocol to facilitate information exchange on promotion activities across state/provincial quitlines, national funders and key national organizations. The resulting NAQC Promotion Communication Protocol is a four-tiered approach to information exchange.

**Promotion Alerts:**
The goal of the promotion alerts is to identify potential national communication activities and quickly alert appropriate parties. These alerts include any available information about the potential initiative, including the target date for finalization, if known.

**Promotion Communiqués:**
The goal of the promotion communiqués is to identify confirmed promotion activities as soon as they are known. These communiqués include a summary and comprehensive information about national communication activities.

**Promotion Detailed Briefs:**
The goal of the detailed briefs is to provide more detailed operational information about promotional activities, including specific initiatives, timing and content. The information is designed to assist quitline operators and funders in planning for and anticipating operational issues that may occur as a result of the promotion.

**Quarterly Call Volume Summary Reports:**
The goal of the Quarterly Call Volume Summary Reports is to provide a brief summary of reported call volume by province/state for each quarter, by month, for current year and previous year (when available). The reports can be used to help analyze impact of future promotions and inform quitline planning activities.
Knowledge Synthesis on Quitline Promotion

To develop the Knowledge Synthesis on Quitline Promotion, the PTF reviewed existing formal and informal (grey) literature and conducted interviews with key informants to identify important issues in quitline promotion. Through the Knowledge Synthesis process, the PTF identified three key themes for quitline promotion to address, identified five promotion approaches used by quitlines to promote services and made recommendations for NAQC to continue to support and develop the field of quitline promotion.

Key themes for quitline promotion necessary to address:
1. Quitline promotion context
2. Knowledge dissemination
3. Balance between promotion and service delivery

Promotion approaches used by quitlines to promote their services:
1. Media
2. Coordination and referral
3. Integrated cessation services
4. Cessation medication
5. Cigarette packaging

Recommendations to NAQC:
1. Document current knowledge about quitline promotion in North America, including the context, cost, approach and results of promotion activities. Specific suggested action includes:
   a. Work with members and other stakeholders to identify emerging quitline promotion approaches (like Web banners, click through ads and new media) to understand impact on reach and awareness, comparative costs and implications for service.
   b. Facilitate knowledge sharing by communicating to the field.
   c. Encourage and support a research process that leads to a better understanding of the balance between quitline promotion and services and the ability to predict the impact of various promotion approaches on quitline services.

2. Develop a shared agenda with members and external experts on advancing knowledge, coordination and collaboration for the sustainability of quitlines. This includes identification of comprehensive quitline promotion approaches and new ways to build resources to meet demand for new promotions.

3. Foster a necessary dialogue to advance knowledge and understanding of promotion success to ensure quitline promotions are commensurate with work to increase capacity and quality of quitline services.

4. Encourage quitlines to document and capture data on quitline promotions and impacts (e.g. source of calls, costs). Use data to facilitate research on the relative impact of different promotions within a comprehensive quitline promotion strategy.

5. Work with researchers to develop standard measures and develop better methods for evaluating promotion approaches and impact of quitline promotions on services.

6. Foster discussion about the “quality” of the call generated by the promotion activity. Consider what type of promotion drives calls from people generally interested in quitting or who are more seriously motivated to quit or make a quit attempt.
Moving Quitline Promotions Forward

The PTF’s communication protocol provides NAQC with a process for its members and stakeholders to inform and be informed about local, regional and national promotion initiatives with potential to affect the call volumes of more than one quitline. The Core Principles on Quitline Promotion lays a foundation for NAQC and its members to better coordinate and collaborate with strategic partners on promotion activities. The Knowledge Synthesis on Quitline Promotion pulls from research and practice literature and experiences to identify key themes and document current research and practice on quitline promotion.

Together, these three PTF initiatives provide an important contribution to quitline promotion initiatives across North America. Moving forward, these initiatives offer an opportunity toward building and managing quitline promotion across North America.

Learn More

NAQC Web site:
To learn more about NAQC’s ongoing Promotion work, including accessing the full Promotion Task Force Report, please visit the “Promotions” section of NAQC’s Web site (www.naquitline.org).

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Media Campaign Resource Center (MCRC):
The MCRC provides access to CDC-licensed advertisements developed by more than 25 state health departments, nonprofit health organizations and federal agencies and offers guidance and technical assistance on how to use the materials (www.cdc.gov/tobacco/media_communications/countermarketing/mcrc/index.htm).

Global Dialogue for Effective Stop Smoking Campaigns:
Began in 2005, the Global Dialogue projects seeks to address the need for updated and accessible international smoking cessation campaign lessons learned (www.stopsmokingcampaigns.org).

References


www.naquitline.org