

# Tobacco Tax Increases: Promoting Quitlines to Maximize the Cessation Benefit

## Introduction

This fact sheet aims to encourage states to promote quitline services to the greatest extent possible coinciding with tobacco tax increases. Quitlines are telephone-based tobacco cessation services that help tobacco users quit through a variety of services, including counseling, medications, information and self-help materials. Their effectiveness has been documented by numerous research studies.<sup>1</sup> Many states have experienced the positive benefits of capitalizing on tobacco tax increases to help motivated tobacco users quit. Possible strategies range from no-cost options to paid media campaigns. Each approach has the potential to increase the number of tobacco users who make a quit attempt using quitlines.

For more information about quitlines, see the NAQC Fact Sheet *Quitline Basics: Telephone based tobacco cessation services that help tobacco users quit* on the NAQC Web site ([www.naquitline.org](http://www.naquitline.org)).

## Background

The impact of tobacco tax increases on cessation is well established. The Task Force on Community Preventive Services' review of published studies confirms that increasing the price of cigarettes prompts more people to quit.<sup>2</sup> As summarized in Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids (CTFK) fact sheet, *Raising Cigarette Taxes Reduces Smoking, Especially Among Kids*, research demonstrates for every 10 percent increase in the real price of cigarettes, overall consumption decreases by approximately three to five percent. The impact on youth is even greater, reducing tobacco use by six or seven percent. The CTFK fact sheet provides additional summaries of data that demonstrate tobacco taxes' positive impact on tobacco use.<sup>3</sup>

As states increase tobacco taxes, quitlines offer a unique and cost-effective opportunity to provide cessation support to a broad and diverse population of tobacco users who may be motivated to quit. Easy access to cessation services and promotion are essential to connect tobacco users ready to quit with evidence-based treatments and services.<sup>4</sup>

The information and recommendations in this fact sheet highlight information gathered for the *NAQC Policy Playbook: A Guide to Promoting Quitlines During Policy Change*. More than 20 states contributed to this compilation of ideas and strategies that demonstrate the benefits of actively promoting quitlines during policy change.

## snapshots

Examples from the field

### Indiana: Media, Outreach and Quit to Win

To promote its quitline to coincide with a July 1, 2007 tobacco tax increase, Indiana Tobacco Prevention and Cessation (ITPC) launched a media campaign called, "There's never been a better time to quit." At the press conference launch, speakers, including the governor and state health commissioner, highlighted findings from the Indiana Adult Tobacco Survey that found "of the smokers who recently quit and who tried to quit in the past year, nearly half (47%) said cost was an important reason." ITPC also conducted outreach to health care providers, launched a Quit to Win contest and offered a two-week NRT starter kit starting in January. ITPC continued to capitalize on the momentum generated by the tax increase and additional funding earmarked from the tax to promote the quitline well beyond the tax's effective date.

### Iowa: Polling Data Helps Promote Quitline

Findings from a statewide poll in Iowa conducted seven months after the tax increase were used to demonstrate the effectiveness of the cigarette tax on Iowans' desire to quit. The results were effectively used to promote the quitline well beyond the tax's effective date (March 2007). In addition, a portion of the tax increase allowed the state to begin offering a two-week supply of NRT, starting January 2008, to quitline callers. This contributed to increased call volumes, which helped sustain the impact of the tax increase.



### Recommended Approaches for Tax Increases

Although tax increases do not require the same type of implementation planning and preparation as smokefree laws, quitlines can be successfully promoted at the time of a tax increase. Tax increases offer an opportunity to let tobacco users know help is available, if and when they are ready to quit. Because the amount of time available to plan for quitline promotions related to tax increases can be very short and/or involve limited resources, the following approaches are highlighted. These approaches are based on the experiences of contributing states to the *NAQC Policy Playbook*.

#### Public Relations and Earned Media

Public relations strategies, including generating earned media opportunities, can help inform the public about the availability of quitline services. The link to increased prices can be successfully incorporated into press releases, editorials and news conferences. Releasing polling data, if available, regarding people's intentions to quit as a result of a tax increase offers another way to promote the quitline. Many examples of public relations and earned media efforts can be found in the *NAQC Policy Playbook* (section "Integrating with Tax Increases/Ideas and Strategies for Promoting Quitlines: Examples") on the NAQC Web site ([www.naquitline.org](http://www.naquitline.org)).

#### Paid Media

Running new or existing quitline ads during the weeks leading up to and following a tax increase will notify tobacco users of the available resources to them. Even if the ads do not mention the tax increase explicitly, the

connection can be made. During this time, it is important the quitline number is well publicized and tobacco users know about its services. Television, print, radio, direct mail and online media are all viable options.

At the time of their tax increase, the New York State Department of Health ran a print ad in the *New York Times* suggesting the tax increase offers a good time to quit. The ad's headline "Are cigarettes taxing your wallet and your health?" encouraged people to call the free NYS Smokers' Quitline for help.

#### Free or Reduced-Cost Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) and Other Medications

If existing resources allow or a portion of the tobacco tax is allocated for cessation, quitlines can consider adding a benefit for NRT or other FDA-approved medications to coincide with a tax increase. If the benefit already exists, quitlines can consider expanding NRT/medication eligibility to serve more residents. As in Wisconsin, both the tax increase and the availability of free NRT provided an opportunity to promote the quitline using multiple strategies. The combined effect of offering free or reduced-cost NRT or other medications with a tax increase has the potential to increase calls to the quitline.

For more examples from states that have promoted quitline services during a tax increase, see the *NAQC Policy Playbook* (section "Integrating with Tax Increases/Ideas and Strategies for Promoting Quitlines: Examples") on the NAQC Web site ([www.naquitline.org](http://www.naquitline.org)).



## Tips for Framing the Cessation Message: Tax-specific messages

States have been creative in how they have framed the cessation message and integrated quitline promotion to fit the state's needs. They have successfully identified messages that express a supportive, helpful message to smokers without alienating them. This is important given the negative feelings among smokers that often accompany tax increases.

Options for framing the cessation message range from making an explicit connection to the tax increase to no connection at all. Some examples used by states include:

- The tax increase offers a great opportunity to help smokers quit.
- Look how many people are quitting because of the tax increase! You can too. (Include relevant data to demonstrate increase in calls to the quitline.)
- Are cigarettes “taxing” your wallet and your health? (New York ad.)
- How much is smoking costing you?
- The quitline is available for those who are thinking about quitting, ready to quit or already quit.

## Tips to Prepare for a Tax Increase

The checklist below has been adapted for tax increases. The complete list can be found in the *NAQC Policy Playbook* (section “Preparing for Implementation”) on the NAQC Web site ([www.naquitline.org](http://www.naquitline.org)).

- **Estimate the potential increase in demand for quitline services** – The increased demand for quitline services resulting from policy changes can be difficult to precisely determine, but previous tax increases in the state or similar states can help estimate the increase. Work with the quitline service provider to review and analyze data. Keep in mind that quitline calls are likely to increase some even without additional promotion efforts.
- **Discuss current or planned quitline promotions** – The level of ongoing or planned quitline promotional activity may impact the decision of how much additional promotion to conduct surrounding the tax increase. Consider all current or planned promotional strategies, not just paid media campaigns, including efforts to generate earned news media coverage, provision of free or reduced-cost NRT or medication, fax referrals, other forms of healthcare provider outreach, pharmaceutical detailing, online campaigns and other outreach efforts.
- **Consider quitline operational issues** – Assess the following aspects of quitline operations to determine if the quitline can handle a possible increase in calls beyond what will naturally occur as a result of the tax increase:
  - Quitline capacity (i.e., how many calls can the quitline handle per day, per week, per month).
  - Quitline budget for counseling services and for free or reduced-cost NRT or medication (if applicable).
  - Are additional sources of funding for quitline services available?
- **Identify other available cessation services** – If the quitline budget for counseling will not support the anticipated increase in calls, identify other cessation services that can service tobacco users if needed.
  - Contact community-based, online or clinic-based service providers to determine ability to handle referrals from the quitline.
  - Establish a referral protocol to fit tobacco users’ and each service providers’ needs.

## Timing of Promotions: Before, during and after the tax increase

From the time the tax increase passes to its implementation date and beyond, tobacco users may choose to quit. Tobacco taxes often go into effect fairly quickly; therefore, preparing news releases, responses to negative media and quitline-related information during the debate will help capitalize on the opportunity while the news is still fresh. Refer to other states’ examples for ideas for framing the message and promoting quitline services. Continue to promote the quitline even after the tax increase goes into effect seeking successful quitters, demonstrating increased demand and illustrating support for tobacco users who are still deciding whether or not to quit.

- If you are a smoker and would like to quit, this is the ideal time to kick the habit.

Examples of press releases using some of these messages are in the Public Relations & Earned Media section of the *NAQC Policy Playbook*.



### Understanding the Impact on the Quitline

Tracking the impact of smokefree laws and excise tax increases on quitlines is important to demonstrate the positive effect of policy changes on cessation. Additionally, it helps quitlines prepare for increased demand. Tracking the impact of policy changes is challenging given many other factors that motivate tobacco users to call quitlines. Media, both paid and earned, provision of free or reduced-cost NRT, fax referrals, healthcare provider outreach, fax referral programs, multiple policies (e.g. excise tax increases and smokefree laws implemented around the same time) and community-level promotions all generate quitline calls. Most states use multiple strategies to promote their quitlines, making it difficult to unravel the effects of these various approaches in order to pinpoint the true impact of policy changes.

Despite these challenges, tracking call volumes, utilization and motivators to quit is important. The *NAQC Policy Playbook* includes suggested approaches used to demonstrate the impact of tax increases on quitlines (section “Tracking Success”) on the NAQC Web site ([www.naquitline.org](http://www.naquitline.org)).



### Additional Resources

Available at [www.naquitline.org](http://www.naquitline.org)

North American Quitline Consortium. (2008). *NAQC Policy Playbook: A Guide to Promoting Quitlines During Policy Change*. Phoenix, Arizona.

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North American Quitline Consortium. (2008). *Case Studies: About NAQC Case Studies*. Phoenix, Arizona.

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## Learn More

### *NAQC Web site*

To learn more about NAQC's policy work including policy-related case studies, please visit the "Policy" section on the site ([www.naquitline.org](http://www.naquitline.org)).

### *Toolkit for Implementing Smoke-Free Laws*

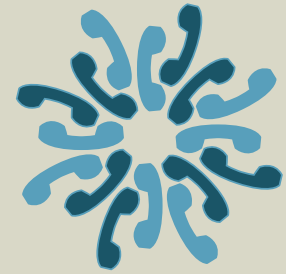
The Toolkit for Implementing Smoke-Free Laws is a clearinghouse of tools, tips and resources to help you effectively implement your smoke-free law. The Toolkit was developed by Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Americans for Non-Smokers Rights and Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids ([www.goingsmokefree.org](http://www.goingsmokefree.org)).

### *Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids*

By changing public attitudes and public policies on tobacco, CTFK strives to prevent kids from smoking, help smokers quit and protect everyone from secondhand smoke ([www.tobaccofreekids.org](http://www.tobaccofreekids.org)).

### *References*

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- 2 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2000). Strategies for reducing exposure to environmental tobacco smoke, increasing tobacco-use cessation, and reducing initiation in communities and health-care systems. A report on recommendations of the Task Force on Community Preventive Services. *MMWR*;49(No. RR-12):7.
- 3 Lindblom, Eric and Boonn, Ann. (June 2008). *Raising Cigarette Taxes Reduces Smoking, Especially Among Kids (And the Cigarette Companies Know It)*. Washington, D.C. Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids.
- 4 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (September 2004). *Telephone Quitlines: A Resource for Development, Implementation and Evaluation*. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, Final Edition.



### About the North American Quitline Consortium (NAQC)

NAQC is a nonprofit organization that strives to promote evidence based quitline services across diverse communities in North America. By bringing quitline partners together, including state and provincial quitline administrators, quitline service providers, researchers and national organizations in the U.S., Canada and Mexico, NAQC helps facilitate shared learning and encourages a better understanding of quitline operations, promotions and effectiveness to improve quitline services.

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