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MEXICO STARTS NATIONAL TELEPHONE SERVICE TO HELP TOBACCO USERS QUIT

North American Quitline Consortium Provides Service Training and Planning

Phoenix, Ariz. (October 17, 2007)—Over 30 percent of the adult Mexican population use tobacco, a leading cause of premature death due to smoking-related cancer, respiratory and circulatory diseases. On Oct. 9, 2007, Mexico launched the Mexican National Quitline—a 24-hour daily telephone service to help tobacco users in Mexico quit. The quitline is funded and operated by the country’s Ministry of Health, National Council Against Addictions.

Tobacco users in Mexico can call 01800 911 2000 for intensive counseling. There is no limit to the number of times a caller can contact the service for help. The quitline also offers Web-based information, chat rooms and referrals to community-based tobacco cessation services at www.conadic.gob.mx as well as referrals to community-based tobacco cessation services.

A planning and training team comprised of 13 U.S. and Canadian North American Quitline Consortium (NAQC) members assisted with the launch of the Mexican National Quitline and conducted a three-and-a-half-day training for 92 Mexican counselors in early October. The team was led by Gary Tedeschi, PhD, clinical director of the of the California Smokers’ Helpline.

The training equipped quitline staff with the knowledge and skills to deliver a sound tobacco cessation intervention by telephone for tobacco users in Mexico, according to Tedeschi. Tim McAfee, MD, MPH, chief medical officer of Free & Clear and a member of the planning team added, “The goal of the training is to collaborate with the leadership in Mexico to share best practices with Mexican telephone counselors, increasing their ability to provide effective assistance to quitline callers seeking help quitting tobacco.”

All of the quitline’s counselors are psychologists and social workers with approximately 10 years of experience working in online public services, but have little experience in tobacco treatment. Therefore, the training was an important component in preparing quitline staff for a successful launch.

NAQC is a nonprofit organization based in Phoenix, Ariz. that strives to promote evidence-based quitline services across diverse communities in North America. Its members include state and provincial quitline administrators, quitline service providers, researchers and national organizations in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

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The launch of the Mexican National Quitline completes NAQC’s North American membership and marks an important step for tobacco cessation efforts in North America. According to Linda Bailey, NAQC president and CEO, “The launch of Mexico's National Quitline makes effective treatments to quit smoking more available in Mexico and also enhances the availability of these services across North America. Quitlines are just one of the effective treatments to help smokers quit, but they are important because quitlines can reach many smokers and are highly cost-effective.”

Dr. Carlos José Rodríguez Ajenjo, technical secretary of the National Council Against the Addictions, Mexico, said, “To diminish the use of tobacco among the Mexican population is one of our most important goals. Offering tobacco users a reliable and accessible treatment option [through the quitline] will help to diminish tobacco use opportunities and delay the age of tobacco use initiation.”

While the primary aim of the Mexican National Quitline is to provide cessation services to Mexican tobacco users, there are other benefits to a national quitline for Mexico. “Promotion of the Mexican quitline will not only make smokers aware of a treatment option, but will heighten public awareness that people are quitting. Hopefully this can help to normalize quitting and de-normalize smoking for the general population,” said Tedeschi.

Vance Rabius, PhD, senior scientist with the American Cancer Society and a member of the planning team added, commenting on how the Mexican National Quitline will impact the work of researchers within the North American quitline community, noted, “Working with our counterparts in Mexico, we will enhance our mutual knowledge about some demographic characteristics of those who utilize our services and in particular expand our understanding of the effectiveness of various promotional strategies.”

NAQC board chair, David Willoughby, MA chief executive officer of ClearWay™ Minnesota said, “The launch of Mexico's national quitline is a significant milestone—effective cessation treatments are now available to tobacco users throughout the entire region. We look forward to working with our Mexican colleagues to achieve our common goal of providing high quality services to smokers who want to be tobacco-free.”

The NAQC partnership with Mexico and work of the NAQC training team would not have been possible without the support of NAQC’s funders, including the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Cancer Institute and American Cancer Society. These funders help NAQC provide collaboration, support and quality products to the North American quitline community. The Regional Office in Mexico of the Pan American Health Organization also provided invaluable support to the launch of the Mexican National Quitline.

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 American. By bringing quitline partners together—including state and provincial quitline administrators, quitline service providers, researchers 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 quitline services.

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If you’d like more information about this topic or to schedule an interview with one of the individuals featured in the release, please contact Brenda Bryan at 602.279.2719 or bbryan@naquitline.org.