



## **What About Employees Who Use Tobacco? A Guide for Managers in Behavioral Health and Social Service Settings**

### **It Can Be Challenging When Employees Use Tobacco**

It can be challenging to make policy changes and engage people in tobacco treatment in behavioral health services when employees also use tobacco.

- Research studies show that when nurses and other health care employees use tobacco, they are less likely to provide cessation services and feel less confident about their ability to intervene<sup>1</sup>.
- Employees who are not ready address their own tobacco use may experience hesitation or conflict about leading direct services targeting tobacco and need ongoing access to your agency's support and resources that address staff smoking.

By taking proven steps to encourage tobacco treatment for employees, agencies can support wellness and improve health outcomes, increase productivity, lower costs and save lives.

- Employees who smoke are estimated to cost employers nearly \$6,000 more per year and have significantly more absenteeism and lower productivity than those who do not smoke<sup>2</sup>.
  - Engaging employees who use tobacco in the process can also be very helpful and minimize resistance when other tobacco initiatives or policies are planned.
- ✓ Employers are not required by NYS law to provide smokers with designated smoking areas or accommodate employee smoke-breaks. In fact, everyone has a right to a tobacco-free workplace.
  - ✓ Addressing tobacco use in employees helps to establish a culture of wellness in the workplace, where behavioral change and healthy lifestyles are encouraged and supported.
  - ✓ Even though smoking is legal, it does not mean it is appropriate during work hours, especially when working in the delivery of health care.

### **Offer Employees Resources**

Give employees adequate and unlimited access to resources. New York has many free resources available to assist tobacco users:

- Websites have up to date information<sup>3,4</sup> and online resources that can provide messages and feedback as individuals are working to change.
- The New York City DOHMH website has extensive information on smoking, tobacco and e-cigarette use for clinicians.
- "NYC Quits" is a website and mobile app to help people get the services and support they need to quit using tobacco<sup>5</sup>.
- New York also offers the New York State Smokers' Quitline (866-NY-QUITS; 866-697-8487) that offers free telephone counseling services with a quit coach and a free starter kit of quit-smoking medications.
- The Employee Assistance Program at your agency may offer additional resources.

- ✓ Assist employees who do not want to stop using tobacco to follow agency policies, especially if the agency is planning on creating a tobacco-free campus.
- ✓ Some agencies have considered additional ways to assist employees during work hours, such as providing free nicotine replacement medications. This can prevent withdrawal symptoms during work, help employees to stay on campus during breaks, and help them better comply with tobacco free policy changes.

### **Consider Policy Change to Create a Healthy Environment for Employees and Patients**

Even if the agency is not ready to go completely tobacco free, there are smaller policy changes that can be easier to implement and still move the agency toward tobacco free goals:

- Most tobacco policies now include language for electronic cigarettes as tobacco products.
- Consider a formal policy that does not permit program participants and employees smoking together.
- Employees could be required to use tobacco only off campus and not in the sight of program participants. Many hospitals and other employers have tobacco-free campus policies or restrict employee use of tobacco using work hours or when representing the facility (even off campus).
- Also consider tobacco use and smoke exposure to employees during home visits. Agencies should develop policies that restrict smoking by the resident when the employee is in the home to protect from the deadly effects of second-hand smoke and to send a consistent message of health across the agency.

Even if employees are not ready to quit smoking, they can still support and initiate activities that will benefit others. This can be an opportunity for the employee to not only improve their own health, but also to become a wellness role model. An employee's experience of becoming tobacco-free is a powerful message to motivate others and to model success and recovery. The message of "working towards" being tobacco-free is hopeful and positive.

### **Implementing a culture of wellness that addresses tobacco use in employees is a win for everyone!**

#### **References**

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3. [https://www.health.ny.gov/prevention/tobacco\\_control/program\\_components.htm](https://www.health.ny.gov/prevention/tobacco_control/program_components.htm)
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