



## Oregon health community comes together to help people end a deadly addiction

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**Guest Columnist**

By

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While most Oregonians don't use tobacco, there are still almost half a million who do. Nearly 70 percent of those Oregonians would like to quit, but struggle to do so. It is vital that we continue helping people find the resources to be successful, because the toll of tobacco on individuals and the state is too high. Every year, tobacco use accounts for over 6,900 Oregonian deaths and costs the state more than \$2 billion. It also disproportionately harms populations that are vulnerable and disenfranchised--Native Americans, African Americans, the disabled, the GLBTQ community, the young and those with low income and education.

Tobacco use continues to be the leading cause of preventable death in Oregon and is associated with a number of diseases including multiple cancers, diseases of respiratory and cardiovascular systems, and strokes. Cessation programs are a critical preventive health care intervention and a fraction of the cost of treating tobacco-related illnesses.

That is why The Tobacco-Free Coalition of Oregon (TOFCO) -- a statewide coalition of businesses, organizations and individuals advocating for programs and policies to decrease the harm of tobacco use -- supported Senate Bill 734. This bill, which passed the Oregon Legislature in 2009, requires all private Oregon-based insurance companies to offer at least \$500 in tobacco cessation benefits. Soon after, a consortium of health insurers and health advocates, including TOFCO, came together as the Helping Benefit Oregon Smokers Coalition to develop a set of consistent and evidence-based recommendations. These recommendations are meant to help people wanting to quit tobacco by guiding benefit decisions leading to the most effective programs and services.

The fact is, there is no one-size-fits-all way to quit tobacco. That is why the recommendations encourage insurance providers to offer a menu of cessation treatment options to address the unique needs of each person seeking to quit. The ability to adjust treatments to individual needs will help more smokers be successful at quitting.

The Helping Benefit Oregon Smokers standard will help employers, insurance purchasers and health care providers to create benefits that help people quit for good. This will save lives, reduce health care costs and increase

productivity.

Oregon has a long history of leadership in tobacco cessation. Helping Benefit Oregon Smokers recommendations are part of this legacy of health. These efforts will be coupled with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid's (CMS) recent announcement of a series of positive changes to their coverage for tobacco cessation services, including identification of ways states can elect to expand coverage.

However, a benefit is only useful if it is used. Health plans, employers, health care purchasers, health care providers and individuals can make the opportunity of the new law and the new recommendations a reality. We at TOFCO encourage everyone working to create a healthier Oregon to learn more about and embrace the Helping Benefit Oregon Smokers recommendations.

Find information about Helping Benefit Oregon Smokers: [smokefreeoregon.com/smokefree-places/worksites](http://smokefreeoregon.com/smokefree-places/worksites)

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