



October 22, 2020

INFORMATION ITEM

SUBJECT: SMOKERS' HELPLINE UPDATE

Strategic Plan Priority Area: Child Health

Goal: All children thrive by achieving optimal health prenatal through age 5.

SUMMARY OF THE ISSUE

The purpose of this item is to provide a description of the California Smokers' Helpline (Helpline), their evidence-based approach to tobacco cessation counseling, successes and challenges reaching pregnant and parenting smokers and caregivers of children ages 0 to 5, and proposed future outreach strategies.

The Helpline is the only ongoing tobacco cessation activity funded by First 5 California (F5CA). Support of the Helpline allows F5CA to meet the statutory requirement of the Children and Families Act (Health and Safety Code Section 130125 A, 130125 C). The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) Tobacco Control Program funds 80 percent of the Helpline, which is operated by the University of California, San Diego (UCSD). F5CA began funding 20 percent of the Helpline in 2001 to support expansion of the service to focus specifically on pregnant smokers, smoking parents and caregivers of children ages 0 to 5, and the reduction/elimination of secondhand smoke exposure to young children. Helpline services have since been expanded to include electronic cigarette (vape) cessation and development of materials that address the danger of e-cigarette cartridges and e-juice (liquid nicotine), and the importance of discarding them in a safe manner.

BACKGROUND OF KEY ISSUES

Second-Hand Smoke Harms Children. Exposure to secondhand smoke in utero and during the first five years of life causes a multitude of health problems, including more frequent and severe asthma attacks, ear infections, pneumonia, and bronchitis. A 2019 [study](#) of over 20 million births found smoking during pregnancy doubles the risk an infant will die suddenly. (See <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/143/4/e20183325>.) Exposure to secondhand vape aerosols carry many of the same health risks.

Smoking remains the leading cause of preventable death in the United States. In 2019, the [CDPH Tobacco Control Program](#) reported California has the highest number of

adult smokers at approximately 2.8 million despite having the second lowest smoking rate in the country (10.1 percent) (See <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CCDPHP/DCDIC/CTCB/CDPH%20Document%20Library/ResearchandEvaluation/FactsandFigures/CATobaccoFactsandFigures2019.pdf>.) Exposure to secondhand smoke in children is still high, especially in low-income families.

This year has seen a dramatic increase in reports of severe lung damage and death related to the use of vapes. Secondhand exposure to vape aerosol can carry health risks to young children due to nicotine and other harmful ingredients contained within the e-liquid. According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), “Children and adults have been poisoned by swallowing, breathing, or absorbing e-cigarette liquid through their skin or eyes. Nationally, approximately 50% of calls to poison control centers for e-cigarettes are for kids 5 years of age or younger.” (See https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/basic_information/e-cigarettes/Quick-Facts-on-the-Risks-of-E-cigarettes-for-Kids-Teens-and-Young-Adults.html.)

Helplines Help Smokers Quit. Telephone quitlines are an effective, accessible, cost-effective, and evidence-based public health approach to increase smoking cessation rates. Currently, all 50 states operate quitlines as one of their primary means of addressing tobacco use. The Helpline was established in 1992 to provide free and confidential evidence-based tobacco cessation services to California residents. In 2017, after a long pilot period with primarily dual users (smoking and vaping), the Helpline formally expanded its cessation services to reduce the incidences of vaping. Helpline protocols and services are scientifically-proven to increase the rate of quitting and are offered in English, Spanish, Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean, and Vietnamese. However, between 2016 and 2020, most of the 13,256 callers within F5CA’s priority population requested services in English (86%). The Helpline also provided services to callers in Spanish (7%), Mandarin/Cantonese (3%), and Vietnamese (2%).

Helpline services include telephone intake conducted by counselors trained to assess a caller’s intention and readiness to quit tobacco use and population-specific counseling, such as a protocol specifically designed and proven effective with pregnant women. Counselors and callers work together to develop a plan to quit, and continued interaction at key intervals over the first several weeks after quitting increases the likelihood of long-term success. Callers are provided with all available quitting options including “cold turkey.” Most callers to the Helpline have a greater nicotine dependence than the general public. Since 2013, the F5CA contract has supported the Helpline to offer a two-week kit of Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) to medically eligible smokers who are pregnant or caring for children ages 0 to 5 years as an adjunct to telephone counseling when all other counseling options have been exhausted. A [2012 review](http://formsus.datasus.gov.br/novoimgarq/39059/7673849_312361.pdf) of 150 smoking cessation studies (http://formsus.datasus.gov.br/novoimgarq/39059/7673849_312361.pdf) concluded the use of NRT as an adjunct to counseling made it 50 to 70% more likely that a person’s attempt to quit smoking would succeed.

Helpline Success with F5CA Priority Population. Over the past year, the Helpline has provided:

- Specialized counseling protocol for pregnant women
- Individualized counseling by culturally and linguistically representative staff
- Services to a higher-than-average proportion of low-income individuals (42% of smokers in California are covered by Medi-Cal and 74% of callers from F5CA's priority population were covered by Medi-Cal)
- Services to an ethnically diverse population – 57% of callers in the F5CA priority population identify as an ethnicity other than white
- Educational materials focused on the dangers of tobacco and vaping on children ages 0 to 5
- Specialized training for pediatricians and obstetricians to ask, advise, and refer patients for tobacco and vaping cessation services

Challenges and Opportunities. Nationally, over the past several years, quitlines have experienced challenges in attracting callers for several reasons.

- Tobacco treatment has become increasingly complex over the past several years with the emergence of new tobacco products. There has been a steady decline in the number of cigarette smokers. At the same time, there has been a steady increase in the number of people using vape products, especially young people. These shifts have created major challenges in attracting callers.
- Shifts in communication preferences over time, with a trend away from using the phone to talk, has led to a national decline in quitline callers; California is no different.
- Historically, the Helpline has relied heavily upon the promotion and media efforts rolled out by the CDPH Tobacco Control Program and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to drive callers to the Helpline. Because the majority of F5CA's funding for the Helpline is allocated to providing direct services (intake and counseling) with only a small percentage directed to promotional efforts, the Helpline also has relied upon statewide media and promotional campaigns, as well as referrals from local entities to reach F5CA's priority populations. However, the effectiveness in reaching the F5CA priority populations through these methods has decreased over time.

In the past year, the Helpline responded to these challenges by expanding the range of services to include vaping and new modalities for contact, such as text and chat to provide evidence-based counseling and resources. In addition, F5CA and the Helpline are exploring a more focused effort to integrate smoking and vaping cessation into F5CA-funded investments, social media, and websites to promote tobacco cessation with the goal of driving tobacco dependent users to the Helpline and reducing children's exposure to second-hand smoke. Finally, F5CA and the Helpline plan to build upon and adapt the work funded by CDPH to be relevant to F5CA's priority population and are looking at innovative ways to reach underserved communities with pregnant smokers,

smoking parents, and caregivers of children ages 0 to 5. Staff will return in 2021 with a request for continued funding to support tobacco and vape cessation.

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS COMMISSION DISCUSSION AND ACTION

In January 2016, the Commission approved up to \$5.6 million over a four-year period to continue providing tobacco cessation services and related outreach through the California Smokers' Helpline. At the April 23, 2020, Commission meeting, a no-cost extension was approved to add 12 months to the existing California Smokers' Helpline contract (CFF 7401). The extension is allowing the Helpline to continue providing services through June 30, 2021, at no additional cost and avoid a gap in services for F5CA's priority population.

ATTACHMENT

A. Presentation: Tobacco Helpline for First 5 California