

UW-CTRI News Release

University of Wisconsin Center for Tobacco Research and Intervention

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Medicare Expands Services to Help Older Americans Quit Smoking

The federal government has expanded coverage so that all Medicare beneficiaries can receive evidence-based coaching to help them quit. Previously, only beneficiaries who already suffered from a smoking-related illness—or took medicine that may be affected by tobacco—were covered for such coaching help.

About 9.5 percent of the 900,000 Wisconsin Medicare recipients smoke, representing 85,000 patients. In part, this low rate of smoking is due to premature death of older smokers from tobacco-related diseases.

“This expanded coverage is a tremendous development for public health,” said Dr. Michael Fiore, director of the University of Wisconsin Center for Tobacco Research and Intervention (UW-CTRI). “Smoking is a powerful addiction, not just a habit, and any barriers we can remove to help smokers quit before they become sick is ideal. I tip my hat to federal leaders for this important advance.”

Fiore said that, while cigarettes kill half of those who smoke them, they also cause serious disease among those who survive. “Seniors can significantly improve their quality of life by quitting smoking. It’s never too late to quit.”

According to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), there are significant benefits to quitting smoking even after 30 or more years of smoking. Seniors who quit smoking can enjoy an increase in life expectancy of up to two years for men and four years for women. Smoking doubles the premature death rate among those 65 and older, and Medicare spends nearly 10 percent of its budget treating diseases in

seniors directly caused by smoking. More than 4.5 million Medicare beneficiaries across the nation smoke.

Importantly, seniors can reduce their risks for heart disease and stroke to those of a non-smoker within one to five years of quitting. While seniors are less likely than younger smokers to perceive the health consequences of smoking, they are also more likely to achieve success in their cessation attempts.

Get Instant Help

All Wisconsin residents can call the Wisconsin Tobacco Quit Line at **1-800-QUIT-NOW** for free telephone coaching and a free two-week supply of quit-smoking medications. Visit www.WiQuitLine.org for more information.

UW-CTRI is a nationally recognized research center founded in 1992 and is committed to determining the nature of tobacco dependence and developing evidence-based treatments to assist smokers. For more information, visit www.ctri.wisc.edu. The Center is a part of the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health.

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