
Tobacco Free Mass

October 13, 2023

Senator Cindy F. Friedman
Co-Chair, Joint Committee on Health Care Financing
State House – Room 313
Boston, MA 02133

Representative John J. Lawn, Jr.
Co-Chair, Joint Committee on Health Care Financing
State House – Room 236
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chairwoman Friedman, Chairman Lawn, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Tobacco Free Mass, I am writing in support of **SB768/HB1169, *An Act providing Medicaid coverage for tobacco cessation programs.*** These bills would improve the ability of people enrolled in MassHealth to access the medications and counseling services that help smokers quit.

MassHealth members need help quitting smoking from providers they know and trust. Many MassHealth members visit their behavioral health, mental health, or dental health care providers more frequently than their medical care providers. Passage of **SB768/HB1169** would increase the number of providers able to treat tobacco dependence making it easier for MassHealth subscribers to quit smoking.

The connection between mental health and tobacco use is prevalent, and we need to enable mental health providers to support their patients in quitting smoking with this benefit. Approximately 50 percent of people with behavioral health conditions (including mental health and substance use disorders), still smoke. While this group smokes half of all cigarettes produced, they are only half as likely as other smokers to quit.ⁱ According to the CDC, like other smokers, smokers with mental illness are interested in quitting, are able to quit, and have a better chance of quitting successfully when they have access to proven stop-smoking treatments.

Currently, MassHealth members may only access tobacco cessation medications by having their medical primary care provider or other qualified MassHealth physician write a prescription. Substance abuse facilities, dental providers, and mental health clinics may not obtain payment from MassHealth for tobacco cessation counseling services. The dental office also provides an excellent venue for providing tobacco intervention services. Dental patients are particularly receptive to health messages at periodic checkups, and oral effects of tobacco use provide visible evidence and a strong motivation for tobacco users to quit.

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We can improve chances of quitting smoking by improving access to effective treatment. Smoking cessation medications approved by the FDA and behavioral counseling are cost-effective cessation strategies. Cessation medications approved by the FDA and behavioral counseling increase the likelihood of successfully quitting smoking, particularly when used in combination. Using combinations of nicotine replacement therapies can further increase the likelihood of quitting.ⁱⁱ

There has been tremendous progress in treating nicotine addiction through the MassHealth Smoking Cessation benefit, but more can be done. MassHealth subscribers need to receive tobacco treatment from the professionals who care for the many aspects of health: dental, mental, behavioral, as well as medical. This small change to the benefit will reap large results. We urge the Committee to provide a favorable report. Thank you for your consideration of this legislation.

Sincerely,



Lisa Phillips
Director
Tobacco Free Mass

ⁱ North American Quitline Consortium (2016). A Promising Practices Report. Quitlines and Priority Populations: An Update on Our Progress to Reach and Serve Those Most Impacted by Tobacco's Harm, 2016. (Thomas-Haase, T and Rudie M). Phoenix, Arizona.

ⁱⁱ [Smoking Cessation—The Role of Healthcare Professionals and Health Systems \(cdc.gov\)](https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/quitline/role-of-healthcare-professionals-and-health-systems)