

Tobacco and Your Business

Although the prevalence rate in Florida for using tobacco is only 16% among the general population, SAMSHA reports a 30 to 35% prevalence rate among the behavioral health workforce. You may not realize the financial impact of employee tobacco use on your organization but it is significant. The overall cost to your business is \$6,112 per employee annually (Berman 2014).

Business costs include smoke breaks, an increased number of sick days and healthcare costs, and absenteeism. There are additional costs associated with what is known as “presenteeism” or lower on-the-job productivity that results from nicotine addiction. Although many workers have periods of reduced productivity, studies consistently have demonstrated that employees who smoke are less productive than employees who do not smoke. In addition to the issue of costs to your business, there is a return on investment of approximately \$960 per year for every employee who is able to quit using tobacco.

Helping patients quit smoking is a responsibility of health care delivery systems, including behavioral health organizations. Although smoking is the number one cause of death among individuals with schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and depression there is limited clinical focus on treating tobacco use disorder, even during times of mental health stability (Callaghan 2014). Smokers with behavioral health conditions are just as ready to quit smoking as the general population of smokers (Prochaska 2006).

But before we can assist clients being served, we must help our employees quit tobacco. Helping employees is among the most cost effective preventive health services and there are free resources through the Department of Health’s Tobacco Free Florida program. Tobacco Free Florida has free cessation programs, facilitated by the regional Area Health Education Centers (AHEC), which may be offered at your business for your employees. For more information about these cessation services, or to obtain a copy of the “Tobacco & Your Business” booklet designed specifically for behavioral health organizations, contact Andrée Aubrey, AHEC Director at FSU’s College of Medicine at andree.aubrey@med.fsu.edu. Working together, we can have an impact on the number one cause of preventable disease and death in the U.S.