



## Communiqué I February 2023

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### Features

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#### Introducing SCLC's New Director Dr. Maya Vijayaraghavan and Her First Director's Corner



I am thrilled and honored to join the Smoking Cessation Leadership Center as its new Director. I started my medical and public health career over 2 decades ago as a street outreach worker for people experiencing homelessness in Boston, MA. This community included migrant laborers, those who transitioned in and out of homelessness, and those who were chronically homeless. Many used tobacco to cope with stressors of homelessness, and for some, their use was linked with co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders.

The lack of access to tobacco and substance use treatment was apparent but neglected, as these problems did not measure up to the major competing priority of obtaining housing. This experience and many others in the field has inspired my career in community-engaged, tobacco control research.

My work in the last decade has helped quantify tobacco use among marginalized communities and has led to interventions to improve access to smoke-free policies and cessation services in these populations. I am a generalist at heart and fortunate to enjoy all aspects of my work: first, as a primary care physician, then, as a community-engaged researcher and educator. These experiences have set the foundation for the next stage of my career at the SCLC.

I want to extend my deep gratitude to Dr. Steven Schroeder and Dr. Pamela Ling for their mentorship and for being maximally supportive in helping me transition to this new role. I cannot imagine a better team to guide and support me, including the SCLC's Deputy Director, Ms. Catherine Bonniot, and each member of the SCLC team. Lastly, I am looking forward to working with all of you—SCLC's partners and network—in

## Four Months and Counting: What's Different Now That Benny Adasha Has Quit Smoking

On a recent visit to Chabad Treatment Center in Los Angeles, members of our SCLC team participated in a celebration (pictured) marking Operations Manager, Benny Adasha's 11<sup>th</sup> day of being smoke free! We followed up with Benny a couple months later to see how he's doing and here's what he had to say:



**SCLC:** Congratulations on quitting, Benny! How long has it been?

**Benny:** It's been almost 4 months now!

**SCLC:** How did you do it?

**Benny:** Well, it's not the first time I've tried! I've tried many times, using the patch, gum, even Chantix, but I was never able to stick with it. This time I used a cinnamon stick to suck on and breathe through during the day, and when cravings got really bad, I would put on a patch around noon until about 8pm in the evening.

**SCLC:** So, what made quitting different this time?

**Benny:** To be honest, I knew in my head that I needed to quit before, but something inside me just didn't want to stop. I think this time, it was the people I love and one conversation in particular with my nephew, the oldest of my sister's 5 kids. I'm like a father to them. This young man has always been really smart, loves school and is currently studying dentistry at UCLA. He, and all my nieces and nephews, have always told me to quit. He asked me to get my heart checked, which seemed strange, so I asked why. He said, "There is one class I have to take and I hate it. It's all about heart and lungs and the damage smoking does to those organs. I hate it because it makes me worry about you and I sit there feeling stressed the whole time, every time."

I literally cried. To realize that my health was so important to him and affected him so much.

**SCLC:** Wow. That would definitely make an impact on most people! How does he feel now that you're doing so well?

**Benny:** Oh they're all so happy! My niece is pregnant, and she said at her gender reveal party that the two things she was most happy about in the whole world were her soon-to-be baby and that her uncle had quit smoking.

**SCLC:** That's so special. It's got to make you feel good. Have you inspired anyone else at Chabad to quit?

**Benny:** Yes! Two of our clients quit with me. It's good to have the community.

**SCLC:** I bet. Speaking of that feeling of belonging, do you remember if that had anything to do with why you started smoking?

**Benny:** Sure. I moved to America, Oklahoma City, from Iran in 1979. There was lots of racism and prejudice, so I really hated being Persian and I hated being Jewish. That was a huge reason why I got into drugs and smoking. I didn't want to claim my identity; I just wanted to be "cool," and at that time, I didn't realize I had an underlying issue with addiction.

**SCLC:** So, would you say quitting smoking is like recovering from any other addiction?

**Benny:** Definitely. Because it becomes the way you deal with problems. Smoking was never fun; drugs were never fun. They just took the pain away, so they *felt* fun.

**SCLC:** How do you feel now that you've quit?

**Benny:** I feel better, especially mentally. To be honest, smoking was a pain in the ass. I was always having to walk away and miss the action. I hated the smell, so I never smoked at home or in the car; I always had to find another place. And traveling, like the 6-hour plane ride to New York?! It was a nightmare!

**SCLC:** What advice do you have for others who want to quit smoking?

**Benny:** I would say, pay attention to how you talk to yourself. Sure, quitting is hard, but it's actually not as hard as I made it in my mind. When I felt anxious or stressed, I would tell myself that I needed a cigarette. But I don't want a solution that harms me. So, now I tell myself that I can go without smoking, and I just let the emotion come, and pass. And slowly, I'm not smoking and my confidence has grown, too.

*\*pictured above from left to right: Jessica Safier, MA, Program Manager at SCLC, Catherine Bonniot, Deputy Director at SCLC, Benny Adasha, Operations Manager at Chabad Treatment Center and Dr.*

## News



2023

### ALA Releases 21st Annual State of Tobacco Control Report

On January 25, 2023, the American Lung Association released the [21<sup>st</sup> annual State of Tobacco Control report](#). This annual report grades state tobacco control laws in 5 areas:

- Tobacco prevention and cessation funding
- Smokefree air laws
- Access to cessation services
- State tobacco taxes
- Flavored tobacco products

The report also grades the federal government in five different areas. It serves as a blueprint for what each state and the federal government needs to do to eliminate the death and disease caused by tobacco use.

[Access the report on the American Lung Association's website](#)



### Racial/Ethnic Discrimination Linked to Tobacco and Cannabis Use

On January 14, *The Journal of Substance Use and Addiction Treatment* published [Racial/ethnic discrimination and tobacco and cannabis use outcomes among US adults](#), a study that showed that racial/ethnic discrimination is associated with use of individual tobacco and cannabis products.

This cross-sectional study used data on adults (18+) from the 2012–2013 National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions-III and sought to understand how discrimination affects dual/polytobacco and cannabis use and associated use disorders.

Highlights of the study include:

- Experiencing more discrimination was linked to dual/polytobacco and cannabis use.
- Discrimination was also associated with joint tobacco and cannabis use disorders.
- For each race/ethnicity, discrimination was linked to at least one use outcome.
- Associations with more severe outcomes were stronger for White and Black adults.

Read the full study [online here](#)

### New Leadership at NAQC



The North American Quitline Consortium (NAQC) Board of Directors is pleased to announce the hiring of Michelle Lynch as its next President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Michelle currently serves as an appointed member of the NAQC Advisory Council and will succeed Linda Bailey, the founding President and CEO, on March 2, 2023.

For the past seven years, Michelle has served as the Tobacco Cessation Initiatives Manager at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. During her tenure, she spearheaded efforts that elevated Colorado as a national leader in cessation treatment access and reduced the disparities in quit success rates among people with lower incomes by 50%.

"It has been an exceptionally trying time for quitlines and the people we serve," said Michelle. "Despite adversity, the NAQC community harnessed shared strengths to pivot, mobilize responsive surveillance and communications, and continue to center equity in all we do. I'm proud to be a NAQC member and

eager to step into this new role alongside the Board and colleagues across North America. I'm confident that together we will rise to meet new challenges, support and strengthen the NAQC membership, and continue to adapt quitlines to better reach, resonate, and positively impact the health and well-being of the diverse populations we serve."

Paula Celestino, Chair of the Board notes, "Michelle's expertise in equity, innovation and sustainability are in precise alignment with NAQC priorities. This along with Michelle's exceptional enthusiasm and commitment to the job make her the right person to lead NAQC into the future. The Board welcomes Michelle with excitement and confidence. She knows our organization, members and partners. We look forward to her leadership!"

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## Announcements

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### Earn FREE CMEs With Our BEST OF 2022 Webinar Collection!



#### **\*NEW\* Recorded Webinar Collection: **Collection E****

This new collection of recorded webinars from SCLC includes seven webinars, for a total of **8.25 FREE CE credits**. Topics include Pharmacists prescribing tobacco cessation medications, tobacco use and race and ethnic populations, power of data in advancing equitable tobacco outcomes, tobacco use and the environment, successes and barriers from 4 SAMHSA State Leadership academies on tobacco-free recovery:

Minnesota and Maryland, and New York and North Carolina, and tobacco use and the LGBTQ+ community.

[Read more & register](#)

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### Don't Miss Our Next Live Webinar!

Please join us for our next live webinar, "**Reducing the Nicotine Content of Cigarettes and the Tobacco Endgame**" on **Thursday, February 16, 2023, at 10:00 am PST (60 minutes)**.

We are honored to have **Neal Benowitz, MD, Professor Emeritus of Medicine, University of California San Francisco** presenting on this webinar, on this important and timely topic.

#### **Webinar Objectives:**

1. Describe the impact of a nicotine reduction strategy with respect to tobacco control
2. Develop public messaging with respect to the reasons for nicotine reduction
3. Describe the potential impact of nicotine reduction on smoking cessation programs

One hour of FREE credit can be earned, for participants who join the **LIVE** session, on **Thursday, February 16, 2023**. You will receive instructions on how to claim credit via the post webinar email.

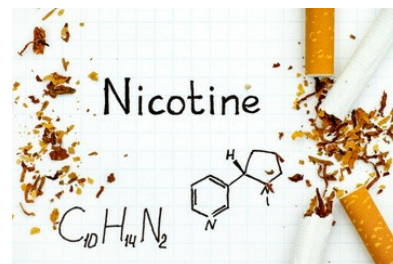
[Register Here](#)

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## Resources

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- Check out ALL of our webinars to earn CEUs at your own pace in our [Webinar Archive](#)



- **Did you know we have toolkits, infographics, online curriculum and more?!**  
Find what you need under [Resources](#) on our website
- **Got tools? Check out our SAMHSA National Center of Excellence for Tobacco-Free Recovery [Toolkit for Behavioral Health Agencies](#)**

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**UCSF** Smoking Cessation  
Leadership Center

National Center of Excellence for  
Tobacco-Free Recovery



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