

From Service to Support: Addressing Tobacco Use in Veterans, co-hosted by the National Behavioral Health Network for Tobacco & Cancer Control

2/26/25

Post Webinar Q and A

1. Dr. Christofferson - you had said that it is required that VA participants must be provided tobacco cessation treatment - IF THEY ARE INTERESTED. So - VA is still using opt in versus the more inclusive opt out?

This is a slightly complicated answer. I would characterize the VA program overall as being somewhere in between a fully opt-in vs a fully opt-out approach. All Veterans that use tobacco are provided with brief counseling to support a quit attempt and more intensive counseling and medication is offered to every single Veteran who uses tobacco – “readiness to quit” is not assessed nor required. Specific programs within VA may implement more intensive opt-out programs – for example, some VA residential treatment programs have opt-out regular tobacco counseling groups. All tobacco cessation counseling is exempt from copayments in VA (free to all enrolled Veterans). Some Veterans are assessed copayments for their medications (which includes OTC NRT products dispensed by VA), and without legislation to eliminate this financial cost for Veterans, VA does not have a no-cost way to provide all Veterans with cessation medication (OTC or prescription). With current authorities, VA could not implement a fully opt-out medication treatment program without some Veterans incurring costs in the form of copayments.
2. Are these programs available to active-duty members?

VA treatment programs are only for Veterans enrolled in the VHA system. Eligibility requirements are here: <https://www.va.gov/health-care/eligibility/>
3. This has been an incredible webinar! Thank you so much for sharing this valuable information. I’m curious—did your research include anything specifically about Black veterans and their smoking habits? If so, I’d love to hear more about that.

Information about Veteran smoking by race can be found in the Survey of Veteran Enrollees’ and Use of Health Care, the most recent report is here: <https://www.va.gov/VHASTRATEGY/SOE2024/SOE24.pdf>. You may also be interested in the findings from a recent publication by Dr. Darius Dawson: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/39172399/>
4. Are there specialized programs for homeless veterans or veterans that are not in the VA? Great program, thank you.

Information about VA’s Homeless Program can be found here: <https://www.va.gov/homeless/>
5. I went online to access the websites mentioned for va.gov mental health quit guide etc. and it said no longer available? Is this the action of the new administration to remove these support services to "cut costs" (If you don’t want to answer this one that is fine.) I’m not aware of any impacts to VA.gov webpages at this time. VA tobacco treatment information can be found here: <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/quit-tobacco/>
6. what the best treatment for nicotine addiction?? varenicline or varenicline with TTs

Varenicline on its own without counseling may help but the best course is pharmacotherapy, counseling, and support.