

Bridging the Gap

Partnering to Address Tobacco Disparities in Vermont

Tobacco related diseases are the number one preventable cause of death nationwide and in Vermont. And the financial burden of tobacco is born by all citizens in the form of higher healthcare costs.

Vermont's Tobacco Control Program has three statewide program goals:

1. Prevent young people from starting to smoke
2. Help smokers quit
3. Reduce the exposure to secondhand smoke for all Vermonters

In addition to these three existing program goals, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends including the addressing of health disparities as a fourth program goal. To that end, the Tobacco Control Program and its partners performed a comprehensive review of statewide prevalence data, trends and capacity for change. The result was a collaborative plan with an initial focus on two groups of Vermonters:

- Those with a lower socio-economic status
- Those with mental health and co-occurring substance abuse issues

These segments of the population have some of the highest smoking rates in the state, and those rates are not decreasing like the other segments of the population. These groups also have many co-occurring disorders – like substance abuse, obesity and diabetes – which impact their health and quality of life.

Three areas of emphasis were chosen:

- Building Internal Capacity – Education and training were identified as critical components to being able to understand and address the complex systems, policies and pressures that disparate populations must navigate on a daily basis.
- Creating and Enhancing Partnerships – Partnerships are key to the integration of cessation and prevention information into existing systems, as well as the sharing of knowledge about the audience and how they interact with public health organizations.
- Implementing and Enhancing Services – Increased awareness of the numerous issues affecting disparate populations will call for additional service offerings, as well as services that best fit the needs and lifestyle of the particular population.

To find out more about the *Bridging the Gap* plan or the Tobacco Control Program, log onto <http://healthvermont.gov/prevent/tobacco>, e-mail tobaccovt@vdh.state.vt.us or call 1-800-464-4343.



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