

Record 122,000 callers seek help from Quit Line to stop smoking

University of Wisconsin and state health officials announce a record-breaking 39,000 calls to the state's Tobacco Quit Line in 2008 and celebrated the Quit Line fielding 122,000 calls in its seven-year history. Smokers are encouraged to call 1-800-QUIT-NOW to get the support they need in quitting in the year ahead.

"This past year has been an amazing one for those who have struggled to break tobacco's grip on their lives. The Wisconsin Tobacco Quit Line helped record numbers of Wisconsin residents stop smoking. This is a true public-health success story," said Wisconsin Department of Health Services Secretary Karen Timberlake. "For the first time in Wisconsin history, our adult smoking rate is below 20%. More smokers are reaching out for help."

Timberlake attributed 2008's Quit Line interest to a number of factors: an increase in the cigarette tax, heightened interest in smoke-free places, and expanded Quit Line services including stop-smoking medications. In addition to the coaching that callers typically receive, residents who called the Quit Line after January 1, 2008, were able to obtain a free two-week starter kit of quit-smoking medications -- nicotine patches, gum or lozenges -- that were mailed directly to their homes to complement the coaching. Timberlake reports that in addition to the 2008 record-breaking year, the Quit Line has fielded 122,000 calls since it began in 2001.

"There is nothing better a smoker can do for his or her health than to quit. It requires hard work but smokers across Wisconsin are succeeding. In fact, for the first time ever, the Centers for Disease Control reported that Wisconsin's smoking rate has dropped below 20 percent this year. The Quit Line's

122,000 callers contributed to that positive development," said Dr. Mike Fiore, UW Center for Tobacco Research and Intervention (UW-CTRI) director. UW-CTRI administers the Quit Line on behalf of DHS. "I hope many more smokers will call in 2009 to take advantage of this free treatment."

Combining coaching and medication is exactly what the U.S. Public Health Service recommends in its new Guideline on treating tobacco use and dependence, released this year. The coaching and medication when used together increases the likelihood of quitting success by up to four times. The annual cost in Wisconsin to treat smoking-related illnesses is \$2.2 billion, and lost productivity accounts for another \$1.6 billion each year.

The Wisconsin Tobacco Quit Line was established in 2001. Since that time, quit coaches have helped create individualized quit plans. The plans include tips on how to live smoke-free, as well as provide contact information for local quit-tobacco programs. Anyone can access this same list of local programs -- sorted by county -- by visiting WiQuitLine.org.

All Quit Line users receive free print information in the mail after contacting the Quit Line either through the Web or by calling 1-800-QUIT-NOW. At the caller's request, quit coaches will call back up to four times to offer more free assistance.

The Quit Line is available from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. seven days a week. At other times, callers can leave a message for a return call. Coaches fluent in many languages are available to callers.

For tobacco users choosing to go online, a Web-based format is now available as well.