

# Our Role in Ending Tobacco Use

**T**he Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently reported that the rate of smoking among adults in the United States has fallen to 11.5 percent, a dramatic decline from 42 percent in 1964, when smoking peaked in our country. Less well known is the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health's (SMPH) role in achieving this progress over the last 30+ years. In 1992, former UW–Madison Chancellor Donna Shalala established the UW Center for Tobacco Research and Intervention (UW-CTRI) and housed it in the SMPH.

UW-CTRI has been at the forefront of efforts to eliminate smoking from our society. Examples include:

- Helping more than 250,000 smokers in their quests to quit via the Wisconsin Tobacco Quit Line, a free, telephone-based counseling service run by UW-CTRI and the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS).
- Assisting over 55,000 individuals to quit via UW-CTRI clinical trials.
- Publishing more than 600 research articles.
- Securing more than \$180 million in grants, including five consecutive center grants from the National Institutes of Health.
- Training about 50,000 health care practitioners nationwide to deliver smoking-cessation treatments.
- Becoming the go-to source for journalists addressing tobacco addiction, resulting in more than 5,000 news articles, reaching billions of news consumers worldwide.
- Ranking No. 1 for Google searches for “tobacco research” and “quit line.”
- Changing how health care systems approach tobacco treatment.
- Advocating for the designation of tobacco use as the fifth standard vital sign for all patients.
- Contributing to numerous editions of the U.S. Surgeon General's Report on Smoking (2000, 2010, 2020).
- Chairing the U.S. Public Health Service Clinical Practice Guideline:

Treating Tobacco Use and Dependence (1996, 2000, 2008), a key clinical reference.

- Leading the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' first-ever Subcommittee on Cessation that produced a National Action Plan to reduce tobacco dependence, including establishment of the highly successful, nationwide tobacco cessation quit-line network.
- Advancing health systems changes such as incorporation of tobacco screening and treatment into health care settings, including pioneering use of electronic health records.
- Assisting with passing a workplace smoking ban in Madison and Wisconsin.
- Helping behavioral health patients quit tobacco use by facilitating the implementation of Wisconsin DHS Section 75, ensuring that addiction recovery centers in Wisconsin adopted smoke-free policies, and that they screen and treat patients for tobacco use.
- Working with disadvantaged populations to counter health disparities and ensure that all people are empowered to quit using tobacco.
- Co-leading the National Cancer Institute's Moonshot-funded Cancer Center Cessation Initiative, a \$30 million effort to integrate tobacco-dependence treatment into cancer care.
- Making research contributions that improved the effectiveness and reach of treatments and assessment mechanisms.

While enormous progress has been made, cigarette smoking remains the leading preventable cause of illness and death in Wisconsin and the United States, responsible for 500,000 deaths nationwide each year. While smoking rates have fallen dramatically over the last seven decades, more than 35 million Americans continue to smoke tobacco products, and half of them will die prematurely if they do not quit smoking. Thus, UW-CTRI's 50-person staff is committed to

identifying effective smoking-cessation treatments and disseminating those findings across the nation. The center is now addressing the new challenges of electronic cigarettes and the co-use of cigarettes and marijuana.

Two pending policy changes hold promise to dramatically affect smoking in America. First, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is poised to ban menthol flavoring in combustible tobacco products. This will empower cessation among African Americans who smoke, 80 percent of whom smoke menthol. The action also will decrease smoking among youths, who are most likely to initiate smoking with menthol cigarettes. Second, the 2009 federal Tobacco Control Act gives the FDA the authority to reduce the nicotine content of all tobacco products to near zero, resulting in nonaddictive products. Research shows that such an action would, in essence, eliminate cigarette smoking from society.

Upon its founding, UW-CTRI was charged with eliminating tobacco dependence and its harms from our society. As a result of 30 years of success, this goal is now achievable.



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