



A time to quit

Summary of Smoking Cessation for people with Severe Mental Illness

Introduction

The report, A time to quit, by the VCSE Health and Wellbeing Alliance, brings together key themes and evidence to help professionals to improve support for people with severe mental illness to stop smoking. The report included evidence from surveys and focus groups with experts by experience and profession.

People with severe mental illness have much higher rates of smoking than the rest of the population, but it has been found that people with severe mental illness want to quit as much as the rest of the population.

This summary will go through what the report found were the barriers that people with severe mental illness face to stop smoking, the motivations to quit smoking and the support that's been found to be most effective.

Barriers

- ▷ **Quitting is seen as very difficult or impossible**- people lack confidence or keep focusing on past attempts
- ▷ **Smoking is perceived to help people feel calm and less stressed** (but quitting has been shown to be reduce depression, anxiety and stress long term)
- ▷ **Withdrawal**- People with **severe mental illness** may experience more severe withdrawal symptoms when they stop smoking
- ▷ If everyone in someone's **social network** smokes, there can be a fear of being left out
- ▷ **Boredom**- People may be lacking in a routine or meaningful activities
- ▷ Mental health and other medical professionals **not having enough training to offer appropriate support**

Motivations to Quit

- ▷ **It's expensive to smoke**- People agreed that this is money that could be saved or used for other things
- ▷ **To improve physical health**- People wanted to feel healthier, and be able to live longer, for their families
- ▷ **Some people were concerned with how smoking made them look or smell**
- ▷ People on **some psychiatric medications are able to take lower doses** after they have quit smoking



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Did you know? There are national targets around supporting people with severe mental illness to quit smoking:

- The UK Government has a Tobacco Control Plan to make England 'smoke-free' by 2030
- The NHS has made a commitment to improve physical health support for people with severe mental illness in its Long Term Plan, which includes support to stop smoking
- Stop smoking support is part of Public Health England's 5 year strategy

Support available to quit smoking:

- ▷ **Behavioural support**- This can take place one to one, in a group or by telephone. It supports people to tackle the emotional and behavioural reasons why they continue to smoke, and the reasons they are struggling to quit. It works best when combined with the use of a pharmaceutical therapy
- ▷ **Pharmaceutical therapy**- Nicotine Replacement Therapies e.g. patches or gum, Zyban and Varenicline (Champix). Many people are unaware of Zyban and Champix which can be very effective to stop smoking and are safe for people with a severe mental illness
- ▷ **E-cigarettes**- These can be effective in reducing tobacco smoking and carry far fewer health risks than smoking
- ▷ **Technology**- There are many free smartphone apps to support people to quit smoking for example the NHS 'Smokefree App'
- ▷ **Cutting down**- Lowering the use of tobacco cigarettes slowly, instead of stopping abruptly

Key findings from the report

- People need personalised support with quitting smoking and no one size fits all
- People would like to know more and be able to access a range of different types of support
- Interventions needs to be delivered by staff who have been trained in helping people with severe mental illness to stop smoking
- Support shouldn't just stop when someone has quit to reduce the risk of relapse