

Help Your Low-Income Patients Quit for Good

New Quit-Smoking Campaign Features Real People, Real Struggles to Quit

By Dr. Maxine Hayes, Washington State Health Officer

During the past decade, Washington has had tremendous success reducing tobacco use. Since the Tobacco Prevention and Control Program began in 2000, our state has nearly 30 percent fewer adult smokers. That equals about 295,000 people leading healthier lives.

Our toll-free Washington State Tobacco Quit Line (1-800-QUIT-NOW; 1-877-2NO-FUME in Spanish) is one reason we've been so successful at helping people quit. Calling the Quit Line is free and can double the chances of quitting successfully. Since the program began about 10 years ago, more than 125,000 people have called for help.

Still, smoking rates remain higher among people from low-income and low-education backgrounds. These people are just as likely to try to give up tobacco as smokers with higher incomes, but they're less likely to succeed.

That's why the state Department of Health continually develops new ways of reaching people who smoke with free resources and support to help them quit.

The agency recently created a multi-media "Dear Me" campaign to reach people from all walks of life with messages designed to motivate them to quit smoking. The campaign features real smokers writing letters to themselves about their addiction. The "Dear Me" letters highlight the effect tobacco has had on the writer's family, health, and livelihood. The videos—which are honest and, at times, emotional—convey the real, everyday struggle people go through when they try to quit tobacco.

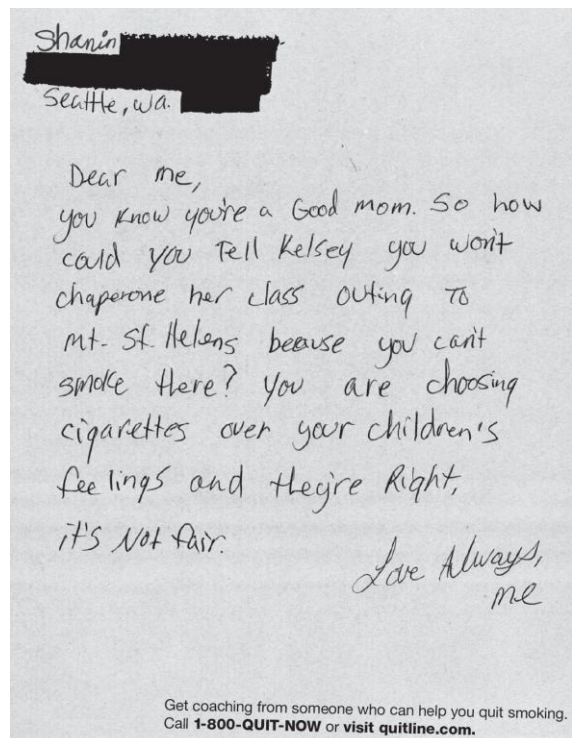
One Dear Me letter reads as follows:

"Dear Me,

When you were 8 you begged mom to quit smoking. 4 years later you started. Now Jack is 7 and he begs you to quit. Mom is dying of cancer and all you have told the boys is that Grandma is sick. Shame on you!

Sincerely, Me"

Each "Dear Me" video concludes with the campaign's tagline, "No one can make me quit but me"—an empowering message that speaks to the personal determination it takes to quit smoking for good. Each video directs viewers to the Tobacco Quit Line for free support.



The “Dear Me” campaign includes radio ads that hit the airwaves statewide in April. Videos are also posted on Quitline.com. Visitors can watch a “Behind the letter” video that goes into greater detail about each person interviewed. People can submit their own “Dear Me” letters to be posted on the site, and find resources like the Quit Line number.

People who call the Quit Line are connected with a “quit coach” who asks them about their smoking history and helps them identify personal triggers that cause the desire to smoke. The coaches help callers develop a quit plan and set a quit date, and provide free nicotine patches or gum, if appropriate.

To reach more people from low-income backgrounds, the state’s Medicaid program now provides support to clients through the Quit Line. The benefit covers Quit Line services and the cost of prescription medication, if appropriate. Medicaid reimburses physicians for smoking cessation referral visits, review of the Quit Line’s prescription medication recommendation, and prescription writing and faxing. All patients have to do is call the Quit Line at 1-800-QUIT-NOW to find out more.

Today, many more people have quit smoking in Washington than there are current smokers. As a health care provider, you’re in a unique position to help your patients quit tobacco — no matter their income. By simply referring people to the Quit Line, you can connect them with the support they need to quit.

[The Tobacco Control Resource Center](http://www.tobaccoprc.org/TCRC/) (www.tobaccoprc.org/TCRC/) has online information. Just click on “Tobacco Cessation and/or Quit Line Materials” to order Dear Me posters for your office.

Additional help for your patients who smoke is available at www.Quitline.com.

