

# SUBSIDISING SMOKING CESSATION PRODUCTS

It also reduces withdrawal symptoms and the potential stress for employees who use these products during working hours. This offers both health benefits to employees and productivity benefits to the organisation. When introduced as part of a smoke-free worksite policy, subsidy of these products by the organisation displays an appreciation of the difficulties associated with nicotine withdrawal, and creates goodwill and a sense of cooperation between the organisation and employees who smoke.

There are two forms of smoking cessation products – nicotine replacement therapy and non-nicotine replacement therapy.

## 1. Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT)

### a. Nicotine patches

Nicotine patches are available in a variety of strengths, by prescription from a GP or over the counter at a pharmacy. Patches release nicotine slowly throughout the day, either over 16- or 24-hours, and are attached once a day. Depending on how a smoker goes with their cravings, there is the option of using 2 or more patches a day if cravings are still present. Combination therapy with alternative NRT is also recommended.

Obtaining patches by prescription reduces the cost. This requires a consultation with a doctor and entrance into a comprehensive support and counselling program (e.g. through Quitline NT).

### b. Intermittent NRT

These products include gum, lozenges, tablets and inhalers. Their effects last a relatively short period of time, and they need to be taken regularly throughout the day. Intermittent NRT products are available over the counter in pharmacies and provide a faster relief for cravings..

## Why subsidise or support the use of smoking cessation products?

The use of smoking cessation products by smokers significantly increases the likelihood of their giving up smoking.





NRT is safe and effective, and potentially doubles the chance of a quit attempt being successful. It is recommended for all people who are nicotine dependent.

NRT is not recommended for use by people with sensitivity to NRT products and should not be used by people who are not tobacco users. There may be individual considerations in using NRT and people should consult with their doctor or pharmacist prior to using NRT, particularly if they have existing medical conditions or are taking other medications on a regular basis.

The following contraindications are associated with NRT<sup>1</sup>:

- Children under 12 years of age, (if a smoker is less than 16 years old, parental consent is recommended)
- People with known hypersensitivity to nicotine or any other component of the NRT product.
- people weighing less than 45 kg can use NRT but may require a lower dose.

**Women who are pregnant should discuss the option of NRT with a doctor prior to commencing NRT.**

Your workplace should ensure that employees have consulted a doctor, pharmacist or other appropriate health professional before agreeing to subsidise the use of NRT.

If any side effects are experienced whilst taking NRT, it is recommended people stop use and consult a pharmacist or doctor. The pharmacist and pharmacy staff are also able to guide people as to which products to use, how much to use and how to use them correctly.

## 2. Non-NRT medication (Champix)

Varenicline (Champix) tablets work in the brain by reducing cravings and withdrawal symptoms after quitting, as well as reducing the enjoyment of a cigarette if you are tempted to smoke. It is important to take the full 12 week course to get the best results<sup>1</sup>. See your doctor for a consultation and to receive a script.

## Smoking cessation product costs

It is difficult to accurately estimate how much NRT will cost as this depends on the degree of dependence of each smoker, and whether they wish to cease smoking, or just use NRT to help with withdrawal symptoms during working hours.

All individuals are different and what is moderate use for one may be heavy use for another and so more NRT may be required. Highly dependent smokers can use a combination of patches with intermittent NRT.

## Subsidising smoking cessation products

A number of decisions need to be made about the way your organisation will approach the subsidy of smoking cessation products.

- What subsidy will be provided?
  - Will the organisation subsidise all or part of the cost? If only part of the cost, your organisation may subsidise a proportion of the overall cost for each employee, or offer a maximum subsidy for each employee.
- How will the subsidy be provided?
  - Option 1: An account may be established with a local pharmacy where employees can obtain NRT or medication. Your organisation would then pay the pharmacy account as arranged. You may be able to negotiate a discount with a local pharmacy. The pharmacy would need to itemise purchases for each employee in order to monitor individual employee costs. This option would increase the likelihood of employees receiving advice from a pharmacist before and during product use.
  - Option 2: Employees purchase products from their preferred pharmacy and submit receipts to your organisation on a regular basis for reimbursement. While this option provides greater flexibility for employees, it would require greater administrative resources and does not encourage employees to seek regular and appropriate advice about product use.
- For how long will smoking cessation products be subsidised?
  - It is generally accepted that products should be used to assist with smoking cessation for a minimum of eight to twelve weeks.

## Informing employees about smoking cessation product subsidies

You can let your employees know about the organisation's intention to provide support using a variety of channels including email, noticeboards, attachments to payslips, items in staff meeting agendas and newsletter articles.

You could provide the following useful information to employees:

- who in the organisation to contact to obtain smoking cessation product support
- what level of subsidy will be provided
- how long the subsidy will be available
- what employees need to do to qualify for the subsidy
- how employees can obtain reimbursement for their product purchases.

## References

1. National Heart Foundation of Australia 2015, Nicotine Replacement Therapy Manual: The Tobacco Story.