

Best Practices for Health Care Providers Regarding Tobacco Use

CAPSA, a national organization of experts informed by lived and living expertise, was approached by Health Canada to develop knowledge products to inform policy development and program delivery around tobacco use. Insights were gathered from 15 key informants, recruited through national networks. Participants attended focus groups to identify effective strategies and suggestions for healthcare providers and policymakers to support people’s health related to tobacco use. This guide is informed by these insights, offering recommendations for healthcare providers based on desired support.

Stigma-Free and Health-Focused Care

Many people describe experiencing negative and stigmatizing interactions with health care providers around their tobacco use. The vast majority have never had a conversation about their tobacco use that did not focus on cessation. For patients who are not actively seeking cessation support this “all or nothing” approach from clinicians can leave them feeling judged, discouraged and unaware of the positive changes that are available to improve their health around tobacco use. By practising a harm-reduction approach with a focus on improving overall health, more patients may be open to discussing their tobacco use with health care providers.

Holistic Care

There are many complex reasons why people may choose to continue using tobacco (e.g. anxiety relief, weight management, or as an alternative to other substances). Understanding the role that tobacco use plays in people’s overall health choices can provide a path to delivering more holistic care. Health care providers need to address the underlying reasons or perceived benefits of tobacco use as part of the overarching treatment plan. People find this approach most helpful when their health care providers have access to a care team with relevant specialists (e.g. respiratory specialists) or can refer them to external resources (e.g. counselling and peer-support).

Meet Me Where I Am

Everyone has different health goals around tobacco use. Respecting patients’ autonomy and personal health goals are essential to build trust. When health care providers meet patients *where they are* in their healthcare journey, they can continue promoting positive health choices without the risk of alienating patients. This recognizes that various individual factors can then prompt changes to health goals across the lifespan (e.g. pregnancy, cost of tobacco, changed mindset or a shift in circumstances). Treatment and programming should support health goals beyond cessation and be adaptable to meet people *where they are* in reference to their own goals.

Actionable and Accessible Information

Although clinicians often discuss the benefits of cessation, people who use tobacco feel that they lack information correlating their use to various health outcomes. Many express a desire for more information about the tangible benefits of cessation or reduced tobacco use for short and long-term outcomes. Clear and concise messaging displayed in easy-to-understand formats (e.g. infographics) can help people make informed choices about how tobacco use impacts their health. The ability to access information about when tobacco use poses more significant risks to their health is connected to their motivation to enact changes in their lives. When clinicians provide *actionable* and *accessible* information about tobacco use, individuals may be more receptive to discussing the options available for improving their health.

Additional Resources, Tools & Treatment to Support Health Goals

Many people find Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) to be a helpful treatment option for reducing their tobacco use. However, it is important to discuss the benefits, potential side effects, and costs associated with NRT with patients. Peer support, such as Nicotine Anonymous and All People, All Pathways™, can be an effective way for people to gain support for their goals, while addressing the harms of tobacco use with people who have lived/living experience. External motivation from incentives-based programs or the use of diverting behaviours (e.g. hobbies that prevent smoking or require increased lung capacity) can be leveraged to promote positive changes to health goals around tobacco use.



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