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Employers and Addiction Experts Come Together at Commonwealth Club to Take Action to Reduce Smoking

Director of the Centers for Disease Control calls for comprehensive benefits to treat nicotine addiction according to CDC clinical guidelines; Employers receive Quit Tips for employees that smoke to save lives and reduce costs

San Francisco, CA—A summit hosted by the Commonwealth Club of California brought together addiction experts, the Director of the Centers for Disease Control, as well as leaders from business and state government to address the continuing epidemic of smoking addiction in California.

Moderated by Dr. Nancy Snyderman, participants examined why, after 30 years of widespread efforts to end tobacco use, 4 million Californians still smoke. Each year, tobacco use claims the lives of more than 40,000 Californians. California taxpayers pay more than \$15 billion annually to offset health care expenses and lost productivity for the state's 4 million smokers. Addiction experts testified that quitting smoking is no walk in the park. As Dr. Snyderman states in her new book, *Medical Myths That Can Kill You — And the 101 Truths That Will Save, Extend, and Improve Your Life*, “many health experts now consider nicotine more addictive than heroin.”

“Prevention is the key to a more cost-effective health delivery system for all Californians. No area of prevention is more important than that of smoking cessation in creating a healthier California. I applaud the leadership demonstrated by Safeway, the Pacific Business Group on Health and the California Public Employees Retirement System for taking on this important issue and challenging others in the business community to join them,” stated Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger.

At the summit, Safeway Inc. announced that all of its California corporate and regional offices will become smoke-free and tobacco-free beginning July 1 as part of a larger “healthy workplace” culture and a successful healthcare program focused on prevention and wellness.

“The goal of the new policy is to provide a healthier workplace and to promote the health and well being of all employees,” said Safeway Executive Vice President Larree Renda. “Safeway has a very progressive health plan that rewards employees for not smoking and pays 100 percent of the costs to help employees stop smoking. We want to help reduce smoking among our employees and applaud this summit for bringing the public and private sector together to bolster employee programs aimed at reducing smoking among employees.”

To assist current employees who are smokers with the new policy, Safeway is offering a free, twelve-week Quit Today Tobacco Cessation Program to employees assigned to sites affected by the policy. The smoking cessation program, administered by the company's healthcare provider, is available to eligible employees, whether or not they are enrolled in a Safeway medical plan. Employees who do not smoke are given a reduction in their annual health care premium as an incentive to live healthier lives.

Joining the Call to Action was the California Public Employees' Retirement System (CalPERS), the nation's third largest purchaser of health benefits in the nation that provides health care coverage to 1.2 million state and local government employees and their families. CalPERS is challenging its health plan

partners (Blue Shield, Kaiser and Blue Cross) to increase participation of CalPERS members in smoking cessation programs by 20 percent next fiscal year. The pension fund is also launching a member awareness campaign aimed at educating its members about the smoking cessation programs and benefits available to them through the fund's health plan partners.

“As a key player in the health care market, it is important to us to improve the health of our members and their families,” said Priya Mathur, Chair of CalPERS Health Benefits Committee and member of the CalPERS Board. “We recognize that tobacco addiction persists as a major health concern and we hope that by providing our members with the tools and information to make healthier lifestyle choices, it will lead to better health for public employees.”

“Save lives and save money – the return on investment for tobacco cessation programs is clear,” noted David Lansky, PhD, President and CEO of the Pacific Business Group on Health. “In using the eValue8 Health Plan assessment and publishing a report on health plan services for tobacco cessation, we want to encourage plans to maintain a broad range of support programs and connect consumers to the wide range of available resources.”

Dr. Julie Gerberding, Director of the United States Centers for Disease Control talked about the importance of promoting smoking cessation. “The research is crystal clear when it comes to smoking. We know that smoking is not merely a harmful habit, but is also a dangerous and powerful addiction that requires a broad range of treatments,” stated Gerberding.

According to CDC clinical guidelines, dependence treatments are both clinically effective and cost-effective relative to other medical and disease prevention interventions. The CDC has concluded that insurers and purchasers should ensure that all insurance plans include, as a reimbursed benefit, the counseling and FDA-approved pharmacotherapeutic treatments and that clinicians are reimbursed for providing tobacco dependence treatment, just as they are reimbursed for treating other chronic conditions.

The Summit issued a Tips List for employers in an effort to increase employer participation in cessation programs so they can help their addicted employees quit.

Employer Tips for Smoking Cessation:

Here are a few examples of how employers can help California quit:

Through Employee Benefits

- * Offer smoking cessation treatment coverage as part of the basic benefits package for all employees, including their spouses and dependents
- * Provide benefit coverage that includes all effective smoking cessation treatments (including counseling and FDA-approved medications) so the employee, along with their health care provider, can choose the best option for them
- * Remove barriers to smoking cessation treatment benefits to encourage more smokers to quit, including: lowering or removing co-pays or deductibles for counseling and medication and removing utilization restrictions (coverage for more than one quit attempt per year)

In The Workplace

- * Communicate with employees about the benefits of quitting smoking (via email, employee newsletter or live presentations) to encourage smokers to quit

* Educate employees about: the availability of benefits coverage for smoking cessation; treatment options (including counseling and FDA-approved medications); and encourage smokers to utilize their coverage and make a quit attempt

* Schedule on-site support meetings for employees with guest speakers (e.g., smoking cessation specialists, health educators or health coaches)

* Use incentives to encourage people to quit smoking, even through multiple quit attempts. For example, lower group life or healthcare cost sharing rates for nonsmokers, awards or gifts for enrollment in a smoking cessation program (e.g., Gift card, free lunch in cafeteria, assigned parking space for a week, etc.)

Help At Home

* Make consumer-oriented educational brochures and guides to quitting smoking readily available to employees seeking more information

* Offer subsidized access to online smoking cessation classes and telephone counseling

* Make educational guides/videos about the benefits of quitting smoking and treatment options available through HR for employees to check out and take home

Smoking Facts

- Tobacco kills more Americans than AIDS, murder, suicide, car accidents and fires – combined.
- This deadly addiction claims the lives of more than 42,000 Californians every yearⁱ and causes undue suffering among our most vulnerable poor and minority citizens in particular.
- Experts agree that Nicotine is more addictive than crack cocaine and heroin.
- The smoking rate among California adults overall is 15 percent, among poor families it's about twice that amount.
- The decline in smoking rates across the United States is leveling off and youth smoking is on the rise.ⁱⁱ
- It's a cruel irony that one of our least regulated products is responsible for the most preventable deaths and diseases in California and the United States.ⁱⁱⁱ

For more information regarding the Surgeon General's guidelines for smoking cessation please visit:

http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/tobacco/treating_tobacco_use08.pdf

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ⁱ U.S. Surgeon General and California Department of Health Services.

ⁱⁱ Bonnie, R et al. Ending the Tobacco Problem: A Blueprint for the Nation, Institute of Medicine. May 2007. Accessible at <http://www.iom.edu/CMS/3793/20076/43179.aspx>

ⁱⁱⁱ Mokdad AH, et al. Actual Causes of Death in the United States, 2000. JAMA. 2004;291:1238-1245.