

Oklahoma

Underutilization of the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline

Public Health Problem

Oklahoma ranks second in the nation in terms of the number of American Indian/Alaska Natives (AI/AN) residing in a state, and AI/AN populations comprise the largest ethnic group in Oklahoma. Of current adult smokers in Oklahoma, 31.4% are AI/AN, making this the largest ethnic percentage of smokers in the state. In FY 2005, it was determined that Oklahoma's Tobacco Helpline was underutilized by members of the Cherokee Nation. With AI/AN populations being disproportionately affected by tobacco-related disparities and disease, particularly in Oklahoma, this public health issue needed to be addressed.

Program Example

In response to the underutilization of the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline, the Cherokee Nation implemented a tailored, targeted, and culturally appropriate campaign to inform its AI/AN population about the Helpline. In partnership with the state's Department of Health Tobacco Control Program, OSH provided consistent monthly technical assistance calls through the implementation of the program and facilitated networking between the Cherokee Nation and health department to reach this underserved population. OSH staff encouraged collaboration with the state, not only through the Tobacco Control Program, but also by capitalizing on the fact that the Cherokee Nation is a CDC Steps grantee. Because Steps communities are funded to implement chronic disease prevention and health promotion activities to address obesity, diabetes, asthma, and their related risk behaviors (like tobacco use), OSH encouraged the Cherokee Nation to link with the state regarding its chronic disease programs.

Specific components of the targeted campaign were as follows:

- Development of Cherokee-specific Tobacco Helpline billboards. AI/AN-specific billboards were developed, pilot tested, and placed within 5 of 14 jurisdictional areas.
- Promotion of the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline in print media and through distribution of other materials. The quitline phone number was published monthly in the tribal newspaper, which has a circulation more than 100,000.
- Culturally appropriate education provided to the Tobacco Helpline vendor. Oklahoma provided education to its Helpline vendor Free and Clear regarding the issue of commercial-versus-ceremonial use of tobacco. Subsequently, the vendor tailored messages to acknowledge the ceremonial importance of tobacco.

Implications and Impact

As a result of the successes in 2006, the state and the tribe have increased efforts toward cessation. Through the partnership with the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline, the Cherokee Nation has seen an increase in the number of calls from the 14-county Tribal Jurisdiction Service Area to the quitline. Data indicates that the number of calls to the Helpline from members of AI/AN populations increased from 85 in 2004 to 545 in 2006. Calls from this population increased from 15.2% in 2004 to 22.5% of the total calls to the Helpline in 2006; in one county, an overall increase in call volume of 60% occurred.