

# South Jersey providers to open new tobacco quit centers

NICOLE LEONARD Staff Writer

After years of limited or no state money toward tobacco and smoking prevention services, South Jersey providers will use new funding to open centers and boost services to help people quit.

More than \$11 million in a combination of state budget funds, state tobacco tax revenue and federal funding is being used to support existing programs and new quit centers, including ones at Inspira Medical Center Vineland, Cape Assist and Atlantic Prevention Resources.

“If people can quit smoking, it will improve their individual health and the population health,” said Brittany Raup, Inspira tobacco prevention specialist. “When hearing about the new funding, I knew we could expand on our services.”

The South Jersey organizations join RWJ Barnabas and Hackensack Meridian Health in managing 11 regional quit centers that are supported with \$1.9 million in funding to provide communities with counseling and therapy services.

Smoking remains the leading cause of preventable death nationwide and kills about 11,800 New Jersey residents a year, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

About 14 percent of adult residents smoke, state data shows. In some areas like Cumberland and Atlantic counties, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation County Health Rankings and Roadmaps show that the rates are higher at about 17 and 19 percent, respectively.

Regional quit centers will offer free services, including group and individual counseling and nicotine replacement therapies like gums, patches, lozenges, sprays and inhalers.

“Some smoke cessation programs cost \$200 to \$300, and it can be a really big barrier for people,” Raup said. “We know there are higher smoking rates among uninsured and lower income populations. We want to try to eliminate every barrier possible to help people quit.”

Inspira Health has always offered cessation services to interested patients, but did not have a centralized hub until now, Raup said.

The new quit center will contain full time staff and be headquartered at the Vineland hospital, but will also extend education and resources to other offices, family centers and libraries in Cumberland and Salem counties.

The health provider worked with the Southern New Jersey Perinatal Cooperative to train staff.

Merle Weitz, director of public health programs at the cooperative, said in addition to focusing on traditional cigarette smoking, they are aiming prevention and treatment efforts at people who use electronic tobacco and nicotine products.

“We’re staying focused on this network we’ve created by reaching out to quit centers and make sure they have the most up-to-date information, especially about vaping,” she said.

Other grant awardees like Cape Assist in Wildwood and Atlantic Prevention Resources in Absecon and Pleasantville will be creating quit center networks in Cape May and Atlantic counties, respectively.

Bob Zlotnick, Atlantic Prevention executive director, said they plan to roll out the quit center program starting next month after staff goes through training and the curriculum is finalized.

Group and individual counseling will be held both at the organization’s Pleasantville location and at other host sites like workplaces, faith-based facilities, hospitals and treatment centers. Other funding may be used to help people with transportation, nutrition and related needs.

At Cape Assist, executive director Katie Faldetta said they are partnering with local organizations that serve or employ high smoking populations, which currently include Recovery Court clients. The organization will start offering cessation services for them starting next month.

There’s also interest from outpatient treatment centers to have classes for their clients, she said, and programming will also be offered to staff of local restaurants and hospitality businesses.

“Our goal is to provide as many services as possible in a wide range of community settings,” Faldetta said.

Many of the organizations are also partnered with health care providers in order to make referrals for smoking-related medical issues, treatment or screenings.

Dr. Theodore Plush, Inspira critical care pulmonologist, said advanced technology has made it easier to screen patients for lung cancer, especially people who are high risk, or older adults who have a history of heavy smoking. Earlier detection can lead to a better treatment outcome, Plush said.

“Quitting is the best thing they can do for their health,” he said. “The list of what smoking can cause is far beyond lung cancer. It’s extremely long. Every time I touch base with patients on their smoking, I really hammer that point home that they really need to get off cigarettes.”

Promoting education for primary care physicians on how to help people quit smoking can help, and Plush said they will now have places they can directly refer people to for cessation treatment.