

Banning, there are compelling reasons for every smoker to consider quitting and there a number of new tools that greatly increase the likelihood of succeeding. Wellness promotion and preventive health practices are important components of the federal legislation designed to begin reducing longer term health care costs.

**Health Care Delivery and Management:** Many experts believe that as much as 30 percent of health care expenditures in the US are for services that are unnecessary, inefficient, inappropriate, or don't contribute to improved health outcomes. This is a highly contentious issue and it is far beyond the scope of this article. Nevertheless, some of the causes of the inefficient expenditure of health care resources include: overuse of medical specialists rather than an emphasis on primary care; an over reliance on fee for service reimbursement which rewards providers for delivering more services and products rather than creating incentives for desired health outcomes; and, the failure to provide useful and clear information on the relative quality and costs of providers. The government can play a leading role in changing our health care reimbursement mechanisms, although this will take many years. Similarly, there are many efforts to determine how providers such as the Mayo Clinic consistently provide better health outcomes at lower costs. For the most part, such changes cannot be legislated but may be key to returning health care cost inflation to more acceptable levels. Because the US spends close to \$2.5 trillion on health care annually, even relatively small changes in cost growth can yield huge long term savings.

### Even if Enacted, Reforms will Take Time

At this time it is impossible to predict the eventual outcome of the debate over health care reform or the disposition of particular provisions. TPEA encourages all interested state employees and retirees to find accurate, unbiased sources of information about the federal legislation and its likely impact as it moves through the legislative process. Our health care coverage is an extremely valuable benefit, both in financial terms and in providing peace of mind and security for our families.

TPEA believes an appropriate stance toward health reform efforts is conveyed by the old medical maxim "First, do no harm." There are clear and growing problems with our health care system, particularly with regard to spiraling health care costs. Efforts to lower health care inflation, while preserving and improving the quality of care, can greatly benefit all Americans and help ease Texas' budgetary pressures. But even if beneficial legislation is ultimately enacted, it will take a number of years.

## Clear a Path to a Healthier You

### Smoking Cessation, Wellness Are Big Benefits for Employees, Employers

by Tom Banning

If there was one action you could take to improve your health and productivity, would you do it? If you could reduce the 440,000 American lives lost each year as the result of one activity, would you try?

A costly addiction is taking its toll on your pocketbook and your health, and that same addiction is driving up health care costs for the state of Texas and other employers.

The addiction is tobacco use and smoking, and its impact in terms of health, lives and dollars is staggering.

Smoking accounts for one in five of all U.S. deaths annually. The CDC estimates that companies spend \$3,856 per smoker per year in direct medical costs and lost productivity. And, smoking hits your pocketbook especially hard with higher taxes levied on cigarettes at both the state and federal level over the past two years.

There's a win-win solution to this health care crisis—and, it's a simple action employees and employers can take together to improve health, increase productivity and reduce health care expenditures. What is the solution? Quit smoking.

Smoking cessation is considered the low-hanging fruit among preventive health care benefits.

While most smoking cessation health care benefits or programs cost an average of \$0.45 per employee, per month, most employers recoup the cost of smoking cessation programs in 3 to 8.5 days of gained productivity from an employee who quits smoking. Unfortunately, many employers overlook the business benefits to be gained by investing in smoking cessation programs. Today,

only about a third of Texas employers offer some form of smoking cessation coverage. It's time that changed. For state employees, it soon will.

State employees will soon have access to the tools and resources they need to improve their health, productivity and - maybe - save their life.

The health care benefit provided for state employees is a valuable and integral part of the state's compensation package. And, organizations like the Texas Public Employee Association recognize the value of prevention, wellness and smoking cessation as a value-added service that's good for employees and is a responsible use of Employee Retirement System health care dollars.

Thankfully, the Legislature agreed with TPEA and many health care advocates. Led by State Senator Judith Zaffirini (D-Laredo), legislators recognized that providing prevention and wellness insurance benefits is not only good for state employees and retirees, but also good for taxpayers. Lawmakers this year adopted a comprehensive smoking cessation benefit under the Employee Retirement System, and the benefit is expected to launch later this year.

Keeping Texans healthy is a winning prescription for everyone – employees and employers alike. That's why TPEA members and their families should take advantage of these new benefits as they're rolled out. If you smoke, you'll soon be covered with the tools you need to quit successfully—for good. If you have a colleague or family member that smokes, you can use the new benefits as an opportunity to encourage them to quit.

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*Tom Banning is CEO and executive vice president of the Texas Academy of Family Physicians ([www.tafp.org](http://www.tafp.org)) and a board member of the Texas Coalition for Worksite Wellness ([www.txworksitewellness.org](http://www.txworksitewellness.org)).*  
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Online resources for smoking cessation:

**Department of State Health Services:**  
<http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/tobacco/>

**Texas Coalition for Worksite Wellness:**  
[www.txworksitewellness.org](http://www.txworksitewellness.org)



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