

Investigating international approaches that effectively help people with mental illness to quit tobacco

In 2011, I embarked on a Churchill Fellowship to the United States and Canada to learn about approaches that effectively help people with mental illness to quit tobacco.

People with mental illness are now a large and growing percentage of the smokers and they smoke over 40% of the cigarettes in Australia.

The Fellowship enabled me to meet with mental health workers, quitline workers, people with mental illness, researchers and others who share a passion and commitment for helping people with mental illness to tackle their tobacco use.



A number of key themes emerged that can be applied within Australia:

- Addressing tobacco needs to be a part of routine care within mental health services.
- Helping smokers with mental illness should be a significant component within tobacco control services, with appropriate funding and proactive approaches.
- Tobacco control and mental health services need to work together to address this shared problem.
- Services need to evaluate the effectiveness of approaches for people with mental illness, in particular those with severe and disabling mental illness.
- Training programs about helping people with mental illness, need to be provided for psychiatrists, mental health providers, general health workers and tobacco control workers.



These are not new ideas, we have been talking about them for a long time but they remain current and we need to keep talking about them.

Currently there are some programs in Australia, including those being developed through MIFA, that are demonstrating that people with mental illness are concerned about tobacco, want help, and with good information and support they are able to stop smoking. However there are still many gaps and these gaps provide an exciting opportunity for tobacco control and mental health services to work together and develop a new, comprehensive and effective range of programs.

Many thanks to the Winston Churchill Trust.

“With opportunity comes responsibility”. Winston Churchill