

Success Story

RECOGNITION PROGRAMS AS A TOOL FOR TOBACCO-FREE POLICY IMPLEMENTATION: MAINE'S GOLD STAR STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE INITIATIVE

As a component of funding from the Maine CDC, CTI is often asked to submitted Success Stories related to different topics or grant deliverables. This story was developed in April 2018 as a component of the Tobacco Prevention Services initiative and has been adapted for this report.

THE ISSUE

There is no risk-free level of exposure to secondhand smoke. The Community Preventive Services Task Force found strong evidence that smoke-free policies that prohibit smoking in indoor spaces and public areas were effective in (i) reducing exposure to secondhand smoke, (ii) decreasing tobacco initiation and use; (iii) increasing the number of quit attempts by tobacco users; and (iv) reducing tobacco-related morbidity and mortality . Behavioral health agencies, hospitals and higher education are all well positioned to address tobacco use and exposure and influence their clients, patients, staff and communities to be tobacco-free. The implementation of annual recognition programs in Maine to support tobacco-free policy change has proven to be a successful strategy for creating change in target environments.

The Gold Star Standards of Excellence (GSSE) Recognition Programs were built with input from health care, education and public health stakeholders, to establish realistic and meaningful standards for tobacco control and cessation. Recognition is given to organizations at Gold, Silver or Bronze level designation based on the number of evidence-based, environment-specific standards met. These include having comprehensive tobacco-free policy, communication and enforcement procedures, implementing tobacco treatment protocols, and divesting from tobacco industry stock. The standards were adapted from recommendations in The Guide to Community Preventive Services, Surgeon General Reports, and the Public Health Service Clinical Practice Guidelines.

The first implemented Gold Star Standards Program took place for Maine hospitals in 2010, and colleges and universities were added in 2011. The recognition programs were expanded to include behavioral health agencies in 2017. The Behavioral Health GSSE Program built on requirements that the Maine Department of Health and Human Services put in place in 2014 to require contracted behavioral health agencies to have a tobacco policy, screen clients for use and refer clients to evidence-based tobacco treatment. Each Recognition Program publicly celebrates and recognizes the organizations' achievements. This includes statewide and local media and press releases. Run at different times throughout the year, these three GSSE programs provide an opportunity for annual outreach to all organizations regarding their efforts to address tobacco.



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RESULTS

Since its founding, the Programs have seen an increase in the total number of organizations participating and also in the number meeting all ten best practice standards to achieve the gold level. This approach uses peer influence to encourage more institutions to sign on by publically celebrating the achievements of participating organizations. The program results show an increase in interest and commitment by behavioral health agencies, institutions of higher education and hospitals to adopt more of the tobacco best practices over time and increase their level of recognition.

HOSPITALS

In 2010, the first year of the hospital Gold Star Standards of Excellence, 14 of 39 Maine hospitals (35.8% of hospitals) participated and achieved recognition for meeting at least six of the ten standards. In 2017, the number of hospitals participating in the Program increased from 14/39 to 33/39. Overall participation in the GSSE program has increased, hospitals have taken steps to not only maintain but to increase their smoke-free policies. The number of hospitals achieving the Gold level, for meeting all ten standards, increased by 64% from 6 in 2010 to 31 hospitals in 2017.

HIGHER EDUCATION

The first higher education recognition program was held in 2011 with 7 of Maine's 26 colleges and universities (26.9% of all colleges and universities) participating with 1 being recognized at the gold level. In the most recent GSSE program (2017), 10 colleges and universities (38.5%) participated in the program with all ten receiving the gold level distinction.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

In the inaugural Behavioral Health recognition program, six of 11 Maine behavioral agencies participating in the program met all ten standards – Gold level. There are more than 200 Behavioral Health agencies in the state of Maine, providing growth opportunities for participation and impact in the coming years.

ACTION SUGGESTIONS

Recognition programs provide an innovative opportunity to connect with targeted organizations to encourage the implementation of evidence-based tobacco policy and treatment strategies. Holding programs annually provides the opportunity to track changes over time and to leverage community norms and media to promote smoke-free laws. Inviting stakeholders to participate in the process of establishing the recognition standards for tobacco control increased buy-in, attested to by the publication of the Maine Hospital Association's position statement encouraging all Maine hospitals to implement smoke-free policies.

