

Maine National Guard Expands Tobacco Prevention and Treatment Outreach for Service Members and Their Families

Somerset Public Health identified and responded to a need for additional support to assist military service members, veterans, and their families to access tobacco cessation resources.

Need: Tobacco use among veterans, military service members, and their families is greater than for civilians. Nationally, about three of every ten U.S. military veterans use a tobacco product (MMWR, 2018). Among all Maine veterans, 12% smoke daily and 4% on “some days” (BRFSS, 2019). Adult smoking rates in rural counties like Somerset trend higher than the statewide averages. This disproportionate use adds to the health and financial burden on the State of Maine, which has one of the highest numbers of veterans in the country.

Results: SPH was able to identify three partners and engage them in strategies to better promote awareness of information, tobacco cessation programs, and other supports available through VA Maine Healthcare, the Department of Defense (DoD), and the Maine QuitLink (MQL) for veterans, service members, and their families. These partners were VA Maine Healthcare – Togus Addiction Services, the Maine Army National Guard (MEARNG) Behavioral Health Unit, and the Maine Air National Guard (MEANG) Dental Clinic.

Sustainability: SPH is working with new partners to develop a referral process connecting veterans, service members, and their families to existing veterans smoking cessation programs, resources designed for those who are still serving, and expanded MQL services. SPH will provide ongoing technical assistance. This project would best serve our veteran and military community if expanded to involve more DTPPs in a coordinated manner to engage more VSOs. There are several VSOs and armories for the Maine Army National Guard located across Maine. Each DTPP could work with groups in their service area to ensure they have the materials needed to access tobacco cessation programs.



VETERANS
Ready to stop
smoking?

Intervention: Somerset Public Health (SPH) networked with local veteran service organizations (VSOs), personnel from the Maine Air and Army National Guard, and a representative from VA Maine Healthcare to establish partnerships and strategize to reduce smoking rates for veterans and military service members. After collaborating with two other District Tobacco Prevention Partners (DTPPs) on customized resource materials, SPH prioritized the need for better screening and referral systems where a variety of new and existing materials on tobacco cessation supports could be used.



"I like that they have multiple ways to get help. Like text, through an app, call the VA, a website. I think the support piece is really important" – a Maine Army National Guard soldier

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