

**SB 621: An Act Concerning a Reduction in Smoking Rates**  
**March 12, 2008**

My name is Dr. Pat Checko. As Chairman of the MATCH Coalition, I am here to support SB 621. This bill would fully fund the Connecticut Quitline for FY 2009. The Connecticut Quitline operated for several years and is contracted through the Department of Public Health. In the past, this telephone based smoking cessation program provided information and minimal telephone counseling to smokers. Funding for the Connecticut Cancer Plan provided approximately \$2 million for a one year contract with Free and Clear to run the Connecticut Quitline for FY 2008 and new services.

You know the good news and the bad news about our experience. In July 2007 the Governor's office announced that the enhanced Quitline would offer free nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) for smokers, as well as up to three telephone counseling sessions. The need and demand for these services were so great that over 5,500 people enrolled in three weeks, and the program ran out of funds for the nicotine patch and gum by August 2<sup>nd</sup>. Since then, the Quitline continues to provide information and telephone counseling, and the numbers of people utilizing the Quitline has dwindled to less than 300 calls per month. The Quitline can provide these limited services through June 2008, but if the program is not funded, it will cease to operate. If it is not fully funded to include NRTs, it will contribute little to our efforts to reduce smoking in Connecticut.

Some legislators question smoking cessation as a priority; why not more prevention. The reality is that smoking cessation programs in Connecticut are almost non-existent. Most insurance companies do not cover them. We are also one of eight states left in the country that provides no smoking cessation services for our Medicaid clients.

Quitlines with NRTs not only increase the number of quitters but are cost effective. When Oregon evaluated their free patch initiative, they reported that the number of callers doubled and the number of quitters increased fourfold from 8% to 18%. The cost per quit also decreased. In Maine thirty day abstinence was 23% for smokers who received six weeks of NRT and multisession counseling compared to 12% of callers with counseling only.

The Oregon program reached approximately 2.6% of their 532,000 smokers, while the Maine program reached about 3%. There are approximately 500,000 smokers in Connecticut. The original Quitline contract was intended to reach 500 smokers a month or 6,000 per year; about 1% of smokers. The response indicates that the need is greater.

To determine the cost of the Tobacco Quitline with free NRT and multisession counseling, the CCP Prevention Committee used enrollment estimates of 3% (~ 1,000 people per month) and 5% of smokers per year. The annual cost to reach 5% of Connecticut smokers is \$7.5 Million; to reach 3% is \$3.8 Million.

Smoking cessation is only one strategy in a Comprehensive Tobacco Prevention and Control Program, but a major priority for a state that has done little for its smokers. It's time to do more for the smokers who want to quit and pay over \$250 Million a year in tobacco tax revenue for their addiction. It's a matter of fairness.

Patricia J. Checko, Dr. P.H.  
Chairman, MATCH Coalition

**MOBILIZING AGAINST TOBACCO FOR CONNECTICUT'S HEALTH**