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QUITTING SMOKING JUST GOT EASIER FOR MEDI-CAL MEMBERS
California Smokers' Helpline to Send Free Nicotine Patches to Members' Homes

San Diego, CA - Quitting smoking just got easier for members of Medi-Cal, California's Medicaid insurance program.

Starting September 30, Medi-Cal members who call the California Smokers' Helpline at 1-800-NO-BUTTS can receive a free, four-week supply of nicotine patches delivered directly to their home. Callers must be 18 or older, have a valid Medi-Cal ID, and enroll in Helpline counseling. If a caller has contraindications, the Helpline will seek medical approval before dispensing.

The Helpline is a free service that helps tobacco users quit. Studies have shown that smokers who use Helpline counseling are twice as likely to quit as those who don't, and that those who use both counseling and a quitting aid such as nicotine patches quit at the highest rates.

"Patches have been a covered Medi-Cal benefit for some time, but were not easy for members to obtain," said Dr. Cathy McDonald, an Oakland pediatrician who refers smoking parents to the Helpline. "They had to get a prescription from a doctor, participate in an approved quit smoking program, and then go to the pharmacy to have their prescription filled. Research has shown that barriers like these reduce quitting."

The new patch service is expected to generate increased interest in quitting statewide. A similar service available to callers from Los Angeles County more than doubled Helpline calls from that county since it took effect in 2011.

According to recent estimates, the prevalence of smoking among adult Medi-Cal members is more than 36 percent higher than in the general population in California. Nationwide, the cost of treating tobacco-related illness is estimated at 11 percent of total Medicaid program costs.

"The most cost-effective way to reduce health care costs is to help smokers quit," said Dr. Steven Schroeder, Director of the Smoking Cessation Leadership Center at UCSF. "Better access to effective treatment means more Medi-Cal members will quit, leading to better health for members and economic savings for the state."

As an added incentive to use the Helpline, members can receive a \$20 gift card bonus. To be eligible, callers must ask for the gift card, have a valid Medi-Cal ID, and complete the first counseling session.

Both the free patches and gift cards are expected to be available through December 2015 as part of the Medi-Cal Incentives to Quit Smoking (MIQS) project. MIQS is funded by a grant from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services under the Affordable Care Act.

About the Medi-Cal Incentives to Quit Smoking project

The Medi-Cal Incentives to Quit Smoking (MIQS) project provides incentives to help members quit smoking. It is funded entirely by the U.S. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). California received a CMS grant to increase the number of Medi-Cal members who use the California Smokers' Helpline. The grant pays for incentives, counseling services, statewide outreach, project administration, and evaluation. The ultimate aim of the project is to improve health and reduce costs by preventing tobacco-related disease. For more information on MIQS, visit www.caldiabetes.org.

About the California Smokers' Helpline

Callers to the Smokers' Helpline receive free one-on-one support from trained cessation specialists, self-help materials and referral to local quit-smoking programs. It is open Monday to Friday, 7 a.m. to 9 p.m., and Saturdays and Sundays, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The Helpline has specialized services for pregnant smokers, tobacco chewers and teens. Services are available in multiple languages:

1-800-NO-BUTTS	English
1-800-45-NO-FUME	Spanish
1-800-838-8917	Mandarin & Cantonese
1-800-556-5564	Korean
1-800-778-8440	Vietnamese

The free patch and gift card offers are available through all of the phone lines above. For more information about Helpline services for Medi-Cal members, visit www.NoButts.org/Medi-Cal.

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