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## **Texas Business Group on Health Reports on Texas Employers' Tobacco Policies**

*Survey indicates employers are prepared for the Affordable Care Act's tobacco cessation rules*

**DALLAS – September 24, 2014** – Texas employers are playing a key role in helping employees and their families kick the tobacco habit according to a new survey from the [Texas Business Group on Health](#) (TBGH) examining tobacco use policies and programs in the workplace. Conducted in partnership with the University of Texas at Austin, the *Texas Employers Benchmarking Survey: Tobacco Use Policies and Programs – 2014* provides valuable benchmarking information about how employers are addressing this complicated and costly workplace issue.

Nearly all surveyed companies (90%) restrict tobacco use at the worksite, particularly indoors (75%). Seventy-one percent also restrict use of e-cigarettes and the like. Many companies offer a variety of innovative tobacco cessation programs and support resources, such as referral to telephonic or online counseling (e.g., Texas Quitline), coverage of prescription and/or over-the-counter medications, worksite educational programs, and referral to support groups.

“Considering the impact of tobacco use on health care costs and productivity losses, we were surprised to learn that most employers don’t systematically monitor employees’ tobacco use or cessation program results,” said Marianne Fazen, TBGH president and CEO. “Yet, nine out of 10 of these companies believe tobacco cessation programs would improve employees’ health and lower health insurance costs. With new regulations in place that encourage health care providers to address tobacco use in routine physical exams, we should expect to see a rise in the tracking of tobacco use and cessation efforts. This benchmark will provide a useful baseline to monitor changes in employer tobacco policies and procedures.”

The research also indicates that financial incentives frequently are offered to encourage tobacco cessation. Some (30%) employers provide incentives to employees who enroll in a cessation program, but even more (42%) tie incentives to successful completion of a program. One out of three survey participants also provide financial incentives to employees who are tobacco-free.

In addition, the survey report provides insights about Texas employers’ communications strategies regarding tobacco use policies and cessation support services, with email and print messaging being used most often by 61% of survey respondents. Social media networks are rarely used at this time (4%), although this trend is likely to increase.

This survey report arrives at an opportune time as employers explore their options for complying with the Affordable Care Act’s (ACA) new preventive coverage requirements for tobacco cessation interventions. According to government guidelines issued last May, an employer’s health plan is

considered in compliance with the ACA if it covers, with no cost sharing, tobacco use screening for all enrollees, and four counselling sessions plus access to all FDA-approved prescribed cessation medications for at least two quit attempts per year for tobacco users.

Alice McAbee, vice president of Human Resources at Haggard Clothing Company, agrees about the “amazing timing” of this survey report. “The report arrived on my desk the same morning that we began an initiative to design our cessation strategies for 2015. Learning what other Texas employers are doing gave us confidence that we were starting down the right path.”

More than 80 large- and mid-size Texas employers representing a wide variety of industries participated in the survey. These companies provide health benefits for approximately 270,000 Texas-based workers and their families. The survey was funded by the Texas Department of State Health Services Tobacco Prevention and Control Branch through a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

According to the CDC, smoking kills 443,000 Americans each year and is the single most preventable cause of death in the United States. The CDC also estimates that a single employee’s tobacco use costs the employer an average of \$1,600 in medical expenditures and \$1,800 in productivity losses annually. This could add up to more than \$1.5 million per year for a mid-size company with 2,500 employees.

#### **About the University of Texas Tobacco Research & Evaluation Team**

The Tobacco Research and Evaluation Team has worked with the Texas Department of State Health Services to produce research and resources to promote tobacco-free communities since 1999. Data-based research and evaluation are key to producing evidence based programs that prevent and eliminate tobacco use. The team is currently involved in three types of initiatives on tobacco prevention and control; research, community and college prevention and control initiatives, and an initiative based on integration of tobacco cessation referral into electronic medical records.

#### **About the Texas Business Group on Health**

The Texas Business Group on Health (TBGH), founded in 1985, is a non-profit coalition of Texas employers and health services organizations dedicated to promoting healthcare innovation, accountability, quality and value in Texas communities. TBGH serves as a valuable resource for Texas employers in health benefits design and healthcare purchasing issues, and advocates employer interests in Texas healthcare legislation and policy development. For additional information, visit [www.tbgh.org](http://www.tbgh.org).

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