



Quit
Smoking



Federal Employee Tobacco Use

*Results from the 2013 Federal
Employee Benefits Survey*

FEHB tobacco
cessation benefit



**U.S. Office of
Personnel Management**

Background

Measuring Federal employee tobacco use has been an important focus of The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) since the implementation of the Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) Program tobacco cessation benefit in 2011. Gaining an accurate picture of employees who use tobacco has assisted in the development and implementation of the cessation benefit. The availability of the FEHB tobacco cessation benefit combined with the ongoing focus on the health and wellness of employees across the Federal Government led to the inclusion of tobacco use items in the 2013 Federal Employee Benefits Survey (FEBS), a data collection tool used to measure the importance, adequacy and value of employee benefits. This report outlines findings from the tobacco use and cessation section of the 2013 FEBS and describes the complexities of quantifying tobacco use.

Federal Employees Health Benefit Program: Tobacco Cessation Benefit

FEHB Tobacco Cessation Benefit

In 2011, all FEHB plans began covering four counseling sessions and all 7 Food and Drug Administration approved tobacco cessation medications with no cost share.

Within the scope of overall employee health and wellness, OPM and the FEHB Program have placed a special focus on tobacco cessation. Nicotine dependence is the most common form of chemical dependence in the United States and can lead to a variety of health problems and associated health care costs throughout an individual's lifetime. People who stop smoking greatly reduce their risk for diseases such as cancer, heart disease and strokes. Although health benefits are greater for people who stop smoking at an earlier age, cessation is beneficial at any age¹. As a result, beginning in plan year 2011, all FEHB plans began covering four counseling sessions of at least 30 minutes for two quit attempts per year and all Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-approved tobacco cessation medications (with a doctor's prescription)².

Cessation benefits are provided with no copayments or coinsurance to enrollees in an effort to facilitate cessation for Federal employees and their families. As a result, all 2013 FEBS respondents viewed questions about the FEHB tobacco cessation benefit in order to assess general employee awareness of the benefit. Nearly **90 percent** of respondents indicated no prior awareness of the benefit, with only 10.4 percent reporting that they knew about the benefit before participating in the survey.

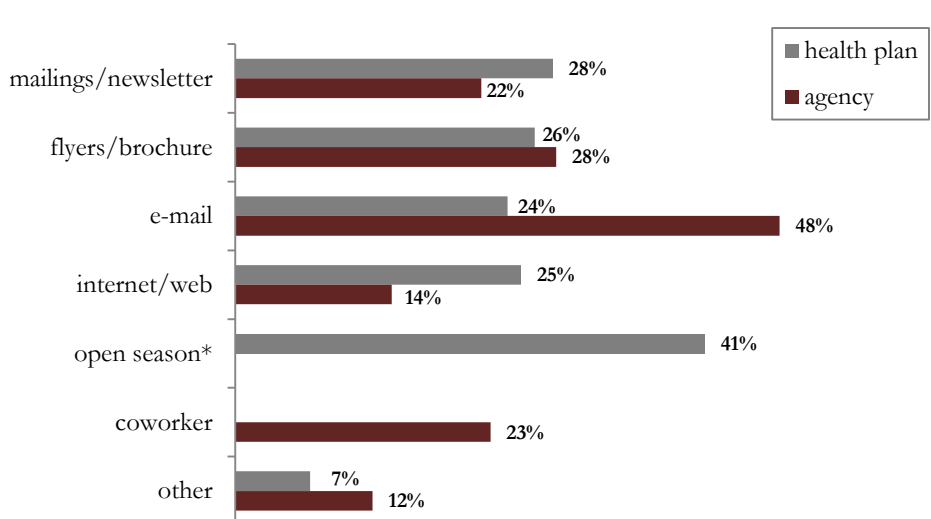
Of those who were aware of the benefit prior to completing the FEBS, 40.7 percent reported that they heard about the benefit through their employing agency and approximately half (53.4 %) reported hearing about the benefit from their health plan. While comparable, the survey results suggest that communication efforts have been slightly more successful through health plans. The most popular medium through which respondents learned about the benefit from their health plan was Open Season materials, while e-mail communication was the most frequently selected method of learning about the benefit through their agency (see Figure 1). These

¹ http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/cessation/quitting/index.htm

² <http://www.opm.gov/healthcare-insurance/special-initiatives/quit-smoking/>

findings may be helpful to both agencies and health plans in determining the most effective methods of communicating the benefit availability to employees.

Figure 1. Methods of Benefit Communication through Health Plan vs. Agency



*Note: Open season was only listed as a response option for communication from health plans.

Measuring Federal Employee Tobacco Use

In order to continue improving the communication and development of tobacco cessation programs, it is necessary to establish an accurate picture of the target population. Determining the percentage of tobacco users in the Federal workforce is challenging due to many factors such as the nature of self-reported data, potential hesitation to identify as a tobacco user to an employer, and variations in the type of tobacco used and the frequency of use. Further confounding the issue are the variations in data collection efforts and inconsistent definitions of “tobacco users.” For example, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) define a current smoker as “An adult who has smoked 100 cigarettes in his or her lifetime and who currently smokes cigarettes.”³ Definitions of tobacco users from other comparison sources (i.e., responding “yes” to a question such as “do you smoke?”), combined with other issues such as intermittent versus daily tobacco use create variation in tobacco use findings within any given population. The vast differences in defining tobacco users are important to keep in mind when interpreting results and making comparisons with other data sources.

Table 1 outlines three nationwide tobacco data collection efforts and demonstrates the ways in which variation in the definitions of Federal employees, tobacco use, and other variables impact tobacco use findings. For example, the nature of each sample makes it possible for postal service employees, active duty military, government contractors and retirees to be included in the research.

³ http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhis/tobacco/tobacco_glossary.htm

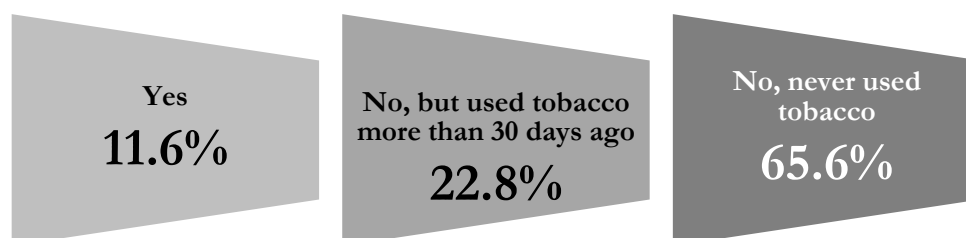
Table 1. Federal Employee Tobacco Use Data Collection & Results Comparison

	2010-11 Tobacco Use Supplement to the Current Population Survey (TUS-CPS)	2011 National Health Interview Survey ⁴	2010 Gallup/ Healthways Well Being Index
Overview	-Key source of national data: use of tobacco products, tobacco-related norms, attitudes, policies. ⁵ -Conducted via telephone and interviews	-Conducted to monitor the health of the United States population. -Conducted via household interviews	-Comprehensive measure covering six interrelated areas of wellbeing. -Conducted via telephone
Classification of Federal Employee	Reported “federal” as their worker class for either a first or second job.	Selected “A FEDERAL government employee.”	-“Do you currently work for the Federal/State/ Local government?” -Then specified their level of government.
Definition of Tobacco User	“Have you smoked at least 100 cigarettes in your entire life?”	“Do you now smoke cigarettes every day, some days, or not at all?”	“Do you smoke?”
Results⁶	- Current smoker: 11.9% - Former smoker: 19.1% - Never smoked: 69%	Includes “every day” and “some days” smokers: 10.8%	Current smoker: 18%

FEBS Results: Federal Employee Tobacco Use

Variations in sampling, data collection and question structure and development limit the ability to make direct comparisons between the 2013 FEBS results and the results of other tobacco studies. To measure tobacco use in the 2013 FEBS, survey participants were asked if they had used **any** tobacco products within the past 30 days (the results are displayed in Figure 2). Only full-time, permanent, non-seasonal, Executive branch employees were included in the 2013 FEBS sample (retirees, postal service workers and contractors were excluded).

Figure 2. FEBS Tobacco Use Results
“Have you used any tobacco products in the past 30 days?”



⁴ http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhis/about_nhis.htm#sample_design

⁵ <http://appliedresearch.cancer.gov/studies/tus-cps/>

⁶ Smoking results displayed in Table 1 do not include the use of other tobacco products.

Current Tobacco Users – 11.6% of the 2013 FEBS respondents

Frequency of tobacco use

Of the respondents who reported using tobacco in the past 30 days, over half (51.5%) indicated smoking cigarettes every day, and 22.4 percent reported they smoke cigarettes only some days. Only 11.3 percent of current tobacco users indicated use of chewing tobacco or other tobacco products on a daily basis, and 7.2 reported using these products some days.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate approximately 19% of U.S. adults smoke cigarettes.

http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/cessation/quitting/index.htm

Demographic characteristics

Differences in tobacco use were found between male and female FEBS respondents, as 13.5 percent of males and only 9.4 percent of females reported using tobacco products within the past 30 days. An analysis of race also revealed differences between groups. Respondents who identified as American Indian/Alaskan Native had the highest reported tobacco use (14.2%), followed by respondents who identified as White (12%). Black/African American and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander respondents had the same reported tobacco use (11.4%), and Asian respondents had the lowest reported tobacco use (7.4%). Fewer tobacco use differences were found between age groups, with the lowest reported tobacco use in the 26-29 age range (9.5%) and the highest tobacco use in the 50-59 age range (12.3%).

Quit attempts

6 out of 10 current tobacco users indicated that they would like to quit using tobacco permanently. Only 18.2 percent responded that they do not want to quit, while 21 percent replied that they are unsure whether or not they want to quit. It is a promising indicator that the majority of tobacco users would like to quit, especially given the fact that awareness and utilization of the FEHB benefit were low prior to the administration of the survey.

Awareness of the FEHB tobacco cessation benefit

Of individuals who reported that they want to quit using tobacco products permanently, only 10.2 percent were aware of the benefit's existence prior to participating in the survey. Similarly, only 14.5 percent of those who were unsure whether or not they want to quit were aware of the FEHB tobacco cessation benefit. These results show little change from 2011, when 85 percent of employees trying to quit using tobacco reported being unaware of the cessation benefit. Despite the low awareness, over half (53.4 %) of current tobacco users responded that they are either extremely likely or likely to try to quit as a result of the FEHB benefit.

Financial impact of cessation

In 2012, Berman et al⁷ published a report aimed at understanding the cost to the employer of a tobacco using employee. The looked at both presenteeism and absenteeism costs, as well as overall medical expenditures. They concluded that an employer spends approximately \$5,816 extra to employ a tobacco user vs. a non-tobacco user. Using the results from the FEBS, it is estimated that the Federal government is currently spending an excess of \$1.24 billion annually on the active tobacco using population. According to the FEBS, approximately 60 percent of current users expressed an interest in quitting. If those individuals would quit using tobacco, the Federal government could save approximately \$758 million annually. The FEBS also shows that the majority (68 %) of daily smokers range from 40-59 years of age. The average retirement age is 60, the impact of a large number of employees in the lower age bands quitting would be quite significant as they still could have approximately 20 years of employment before reaching retirement age.

⁷Berman, Micah, et al. "Estimating the cost of a smoking employee." *Tobacco control* (2013).

Former Tobacco Users – 22.8% of the 2013 FEBS sample

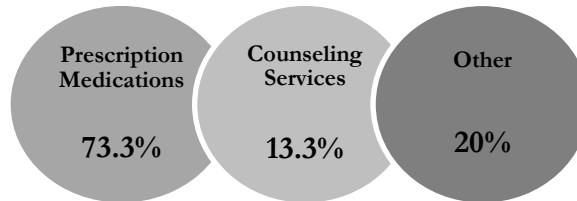
91.6 percent of tobacco users who quit within the past two years reported they did not utilize the FEHB tobacco cessation benefit.

Respondents in this category indicated use of some form of tobacco more than 30 days ago. An important figure derived from the subgroup is that **15.8 percent** of the former tobacco users identified themselves as intermittent or social tobacco users. This subgroup can be difficult to isolate due to differences in self-classification, but is an essential group to consider when tailoring tobacco cessation programs. Within the social/intermittent tobacco use category, almost three-fourths (70.8 %) were male.

The strong majority of former smokers (72.4 %) indicated that they quit using tobacco more than two years ago, and only 11.8 percent reported quitting tobacco within the past two years. The FEHB cessation benefit was implemented in 2011, so questions about the benefit utilization were limited to respondents who reported quitting within the past two years. Despite the availability of the FEHB tobacco cessation benefit, only 4.3 percent of respondents who quit using tobacco within the past two years reported using one or more elements of the benefit. The overwhelming majority (91.6 %) indicated that they did not use the benefit and 4.1 percent responded that they were unsure whether or not they had used the benefit.

Of the individuals who utilized the FEHB benefit when quitting, Figure 3 shows that over 70 percent reported use of the prescription medication feature.

Figure 3. Elements of FEHB benefit utilized by former tobacco users who quit within the past two years



Conclusions

Defining “tobacco users” in the 2013 FEBS

Defining and quantifying tobacco users can be complex, especially when collecting this information through self-report surveys. For the purposes of the Office of Personnel Management’s (OPM) program and benefit administration, the priority is to establish the approximate percentage of current Federal employees who use tobacco both regularly and on an infrequent/social basis. Tobacco users were identified if they indicated use of **any** tobacco product within the past 30 days. Understanding the composition and behavior of this population will assist OPM and all Federal agencies in effectively targeting cessation benefit communication and administration. Acknowledging the limited ability to draw comparisons between other tobacco data sources and the 2013 FEBS is critical due to the many variations in methodology, classification of Federal employment, and definition of tobacco users/smokers.

Only 15 percent of employees who tried to quit more than five times in the past year were aware of the FEHB Tobacco Cessation Benefit.

Most Federal tobacco users report a desire to quit despite low awareness of the FEHB cessation benefit

The survey results are promising in that over half of current tobacco users show a desire to quit. Many current users have attempted without success to quit in the past, which represents a definite need for the FEHB tobacco cessation benefit. The challenge moving forward, however, is to find ways to increase employee awareness of the benefit. Employees are generally unaware of the availability and features of the benefit, which demonstrates the need for targeted communication efforts and partnerships between health plans and agencies.

Perhaps the most telling indication is in the finding that only 15 percent of employees who tried to quit more than five times in the past year were aware of the benefit. This figure represents a great opportunity to engage and inform employees who are actively trying to quit using tobacco. It is also important to recognize the possibility that some current and former tobacco users may have inadvertently used the benefit without being aware of the benefit. Employees have varying levels of engagement in their health plan coverage and changes to benefits, so individuals may not always be aware of the cessation benefit’s impact.

Next steps

While the majority of survey respondents (both tobacco users and non-users) reported that they were unaware of the benefit, over half of the current tobacco users reported a likelihood of quitting after being informed of the benefit’s availability. Findings such as these suggest strategic, targeted communication by both agencies and health plans with the engagement of health care providers could encourage current tobacco users to utilize the benefit.

2013 Federal Employee Benefits Survey: Background & Methods

Purpose: The Federal Employee Benefits Survey (FEBS) is the primary employee benefit data collection tool. The 2013 FEBS was designed to measure the importance, adequacy and value of employee benefits to ensure that available benefits align with best practices and employee needs. The FEBS results help the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to determine whether or not Federal employees understand the flexibilities and benefits available to them, and drive benefit program and policy development. As a result of the ongoing focus on health and wellness programs across the Federal Government, the FEBS continues to focus on capturing employee health status, health demographics and tobacco use and cessation that began with the 2011 survey administration.

Survey Sample: The FEBS was administered to a random sample of approximately 40,000 full-time, permanent, non-seasonal executive branch employees of the Federal Government. Employees on-board as of February 2013 were eligible.

Survey Mode: A link to the web survey was sent out electronically via email invitation.

Survey Field Period: Administration of the FEBS began on September 4, 2013 and continued through October 22, 2013.

Response Rate: The FEBS had an overall response rate of 35 percent.



UNITED STATES
OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
Planning and Policy Analysis
1900 E Street, NW
Washington, DC 20415