



## **NEWS RELEASE**

### **ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH**

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#### **Free online service helps tobacco users quit**

##### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Alabamians tired of being addicted to tobacco have a new free service to help them quit.

The service -- <http://www.alabamaquitnow.com/> -- is a web-based program designed to work with the user to make a personalized plan for quitting tobacco. This service includes free master's level counseling and four weeks of free nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) patches if the user is actively engaged in counseling and is medically eligible.

The site is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Tobacco users can log in and begin the counseling process. Anyone can visit the site for information or register to become a member. Members can chat with other users who are quitting at the same time.

While anyone can visit the site, free counseling services and NRT are available to Alabama residents only. Alabamaquitnow.com is funded through the Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) with a grant from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

The free online service is in addition to the Alabama Tobacco Quitline, a phone-based service that provides the same free programs to users who prefer to talk to a counselor to make their quit plan. Callers may dial 1-800-QuitNow (1-800-784-8669) and sign up for phone services. Alabama's Quitline has been in operation since 2005 and is funded by ADPH and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Alabama has one of the highest smoking rates in the nation, said Julie Nightengale, cessation services program manager for the Tobacco Prevention Branch of ADPH. More than one in five Alabamians use tobacco, she said.

“By offering free Internet and telephone services, no one has to leave home or pay for medication to help them quit,” she said. “Callers must be enrolled in counseling to get the free NRT,” Nightengale said.

The NRT is mailed directly to the user if there are no concerns about medications the user is taking. If the user is taking certain medications that could interfere with the NRT, the Quitline will ask the user’s doctor for permission to send the NRT, she said.

More than 7600 Alabamians die each year as a result of their smoking, with another 850 nonsmokers in the state dying as result of secondhand smoke.

Live counselors are available at both services from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Friday and on Saturday from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Messages can be left after those hours and will be returned the next business day. A Spanish-speaking counselor is available, and other languages are available as needed through a translator program for the phone service.

Healthcare providers can use the fax referral form found on the ADPH Web site and on the Alabamaquitnow.com site to refer their patients. Counselors at the Quitline or alabamaquitnow.com can directly contact the patient to help him or her make a plan to quit tobacco use. If the patient agrees, the healthcare provider can have access to the patient’s progress in quitting tobacco.

Tobacco users are twice as likely to quit if recommended by their healthcare provider, said Nightengale. ADPH also provides accredited training for healthcare provider staff to ask about tobacco use to all their patients.

For more information about Alabamaquitnow.com or the Quitline, call Nightengale at (334) 206-6432.