

Smoke-free Coffee Break Launch of National Non-Smoking Week

Monday, January 18, 10 AM to 10:30 AM

CMHA office, 930 Portage Avenue

(January 15, 2015, Winnipeg, MB) – The Canadian Mental Health Association (Manitoba and Winnipeg) and the Manitoba Lung Association are pleased to announce **Breathe Easy, Feel Fine**, a partnership supporting quitting or reducing tobacco use focused on mental health.

Join us for a smoke-free coffee break and the release of two new resources focused on smoking cessation and mental health:

- *Breathe Easy, Feel Fine* – a resource for taking care of your mental health during smoking cessation,
- *Smoking and Your Mental Health* – An information sheet for people living with a mental illness.

The break launches a week of activities happening at CMHA in partnership with the Manitoba Lung Association, including:

- Smoke-free coffee break activities for staff,
- A workshop for mental health consumers interested in finding out how to plan smoking cessation in the context of their recovery,
- Staff training on supporting participants to reduce or quit smoking.

“People living with mental illness are 2 to 4 times more likely to smoke than the general population,” says Marion Cooper, Executive Director of CMHA. “Studies have shown that people living with mental illness are often not encouraged or supported to reduce or quit by support workers or health providers. The training and resources we’re releasing hope to change that.”

The resources will be available for download at winnipeg.cmha.ca and ManitobaQuits.ca

“All employers can have a role in supporting their employees to reduce and quit smoking,” says Margaret Bernhardt-Lowdon, Executive Director of the Manitoba Lung Association. “And they can do that by supporting good mental health in the workplace.”

See the attached backgrounder for how workplaces can support good mental health and create supportive workplaces for reducing and quitting smoking.

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Backgrounder:

Smoking and the Workplace

People spend the majority of their day at work and co-workers can become like family. Smoke-breaks often provide a break and a time to socialize on the job. Smoke-breaks can seem like the glue that holds the group at work together.

“We know that 75 per cent of smokers want to quit – they just need the support,” says Margaret Bernhardt-Lowdon, Executive Director of the Manitoba Lung Association. “Support in the workplace can go a long way to helping people to quit,” she adds.

It is also bad news for mental health – stress, depression and anxiety get worse – not better with smoking.

“There are a lot of really entrenched myths about smoking and mental health,” says Marion Cooper, Executive Director of CMHA. “Smoking *doesn't* reduce stress.”

“Reducing and quitting can be stressful and have negative impacts on our mental health in the short-term,” says Cooper. “Focusing on mental health wellness should be a key part of anyone’s quit plan.”

During National Non-Smoking Week, CMHA will encourage staff to take one *smoke-free* break a day.

“A smoke-free break is a great way to help staff create a supportive environment for reducing and quitting smoking,” says Lowdon. “It can bridge the smoker and non-smoker cliques that develop at workplaces. Focusing on the mental health of all staff can also take some pressure off people who are thinking of quitting but might feel self-conscious or have anxiety about ‘abandoning their smoke-buddies’ or worry about losing out on breaks!”

What workplaces can do?

- Ask your co-workers to become your “smoke-free buddies”. Tell them how they can support you.
- If you have smoke buddies, let them know you want to reduce or quit smoking. Ask them if they would be willing to give up a smoke-break so you can catch up on their lives.
- Create smoke-free meeting spots. Maybe it’s the lunch room, but maybe it’s outside (in a different location than where you used to smoke!).
- Instead of a smoke-break, invite your co-workers to an apple-eating break or a carrot-eating break, or a let’s-make-silly-faces-in-the-bathroom-mirror-break. Take the opportunity to be inventive or silly.
- Tied to your desk? Learn a couple of chair stretches or yoga poses. Have a glass of water available to drink. Post a positive note by your computer.
- Realize that reducing or quitting smoking can be hard, that offering non-judgemental support and distraction can be helpful, and that not all stress is related to reducing or quitting smoking.