

6 Ways Tobacco Use Hurts Today's Retail Employers

09/03/2019 Megan Jacobs | Managing Director of Product, Innovations



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In the tight-margin industry of retail, innovating to contain employee healthcare costs is a must. But it isn't the only thing that matters. Just ask retail giant [Walmart](#)—well-recognized both for its cost-effective use of healthcare resources and for prioritizing the employee healthcare experience.

Tobacco cessation is one example of a critical employee benefit that can help minimize healthcare spend—when it's delivered in ways that employees want to use. So why isn't it top of mind for all HR benefit leaders in retail companies?

The brutal impact of employee tobacco use in retail

Here are 6 critical reasons why an effective, easy-to-use quit-tobacco program for cigarettes, e-cigarettes, and chewing tobacco is a priority benefit for retail companies.

- 1. **High tobacco use:** The retail industry has one of the highest rates of tobacco use. About 1 in 4 retail workers (24%) use some form of tobacco.



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- 2. **Impacts on productivity:** On average, retail workers spend [an hour and 20 minutes each day on tobacco breaks](#). These breaks add up to over 40 hours a month and more than 20 days of lost productivity every year.



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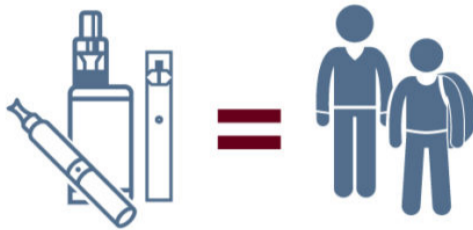


productivity

3. **Young workers at risk:** Nearly a quarter of retail employees (3.7 million) are between ages 16 and 24. E-cigarette use or “vaping” is escalating at an alarming rate among youth, with the highest usage among adults ages 18-24.

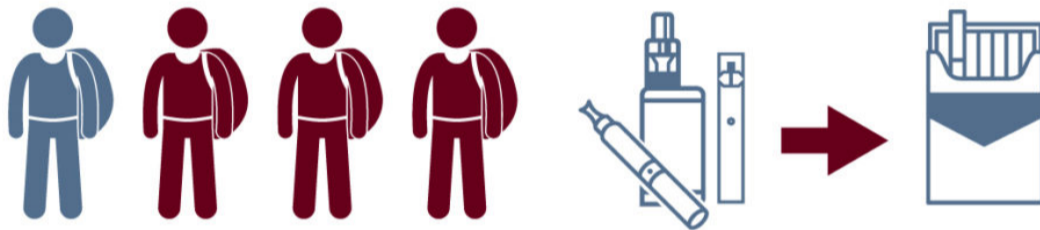
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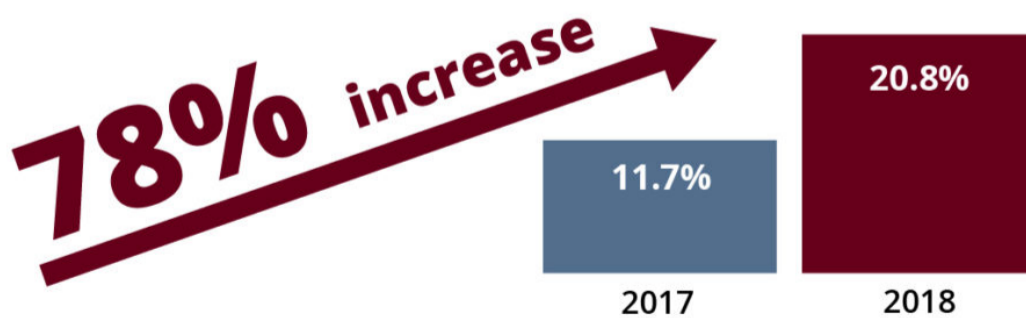
Nearly all e-cigarettes contain nicotine, which can harm brain development and alter nerve cell functioning in young people. It can also make them more vulnerable to smoking. Young people who use e-cigarettes and weren't smokers in the first place are 4X more likely to start smoking traditional cigarettes than their peers who don't use e-cigarettes. (Learn more about why this matters to retailers in reason #6)



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4. **Parents of vapers need support:** The average age for a retail sales worker is 38, and these workers are likely to have children. Today, nearly 21% of high school students are e-cigarette users—a 78% increase from 2017. Preoccupied with worry about potential nicotine addiction and the health implications for their child, employees who are parents are prone to be distracted at work.

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5. **Reduced sleep and other costly health effects:** Working in retail isn't easy. Long hours, varied schedules, and dealing with consumers is exhausting. But for workers who smoke, recovering with a good night's sleep is tougher to come by.

[New research](#) suggests nicotine is the biggest sleep wrecker—more than caffeine or alcohol. Poor sleep increases a person's risk for a variety of costly



chronic conditions, including diabetes and coronary heart disease.

Smokers vs. nonsmokers are also more likely to develop a long list of other expensive diseases too, such as stroke and lung cancer.

6. **Long-term implications:** Many retail employees start their careers on the frontline and then take on supervisory, management, and leadership positions as their careers progress. This means workers take their tobacco use—and the impacts on productivity and healthcare costs—with them as they move up the retail ladder. Ouch.

Retailers need an innovative approach to help employees quit

Tobacco users are much more likely to successfully quit when they receive help. But the type of help they receive can make or break engagement. The employee experience is critical.

So as you're sizing up your current tobacco cessation provider against these reasons to act now, I encourage you to reflect on these questions: Does it provide multi-modal support to address different communication preferences for tobacco users of different ages? Does it address all forms of tobacco—including e-cigarettes? Does it provide support to parents of vapers? The short answer: It should.

Retail employers today need creative programs that meet retail workers' needs, including:

- Live chat coaching to tap into while on a break
- An online community to connect 24/7 with peers who are facing the same challenges and who have successfully quit
- Text messaging for a check-in to get support before or after a shift
- Free quit medication that's delivered right to their home
- A digital, mobile-friendly library of evidence-based resources

The EX Program delivers all of this and more. To start a conversation and learn how we can better meet the unique needs of your retail workforce, please [contact us today](#).

Interested in learning more about our support for adult and young adult e-cigarette users? See [Why E-cigarette Users Need Smoking Cessation Programs Too](#).

Learn More

[Watch our short video on how the EX Program works](#)

Schedule a Demo

[Schedule time with a representative for an overview of the EX Program, and have your questions answered](#)



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Megan Jacobs is responsible for the design, delivery, and evaluation of the EX Program. Most recently, Jacobs led the EX Program team responsible for the first evidence-based text messaging program to help e-cigarette users of all ages quit. She formed her expertise in mHealth interventions and public health campaigns with her work at the University of Michigan Health Service, DC Department of Health, and the National Vaccine Program Office. Her public health



National Vaccine Program Office. Her public health work over the past 15 years has applied technology to behavior change ranging from adolescent sexual health to vaccinations. Jacobs received her Master of

Public Health from the Milken Institute School of Public Health at George Washington University and is also a graduate of the University of Michigan.

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