



A healthy workplace is good for business

SUBSIDISING SMOKING CESSATION PRODUCTS

Why subsidise or support the use of smoking cessation products?

The use of smoking cessation products by smokers significantly increases the likelihood of their giving up smoking.

It also reduces withdrawal symptoms and the potential stress for employees who use these products during working hours. This offers both health benefits to employees and productivity benefits to the organisation. When introduced as part of a smoke-free worksite policy, subsidy of these products by the organisation displays an appreciation of the difficulties associated with nicotine withdrawal, and creates goodwill and a sense of cooperation between the organisation and employees who smoke.

There are two forms of smoking cessation products – nicotine replacement therapy and non-nicotine replacement therapy.

I. Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT)

a. Nicotine patches

Nicotine patches are available in a variety of strengths, by prescription from a GP or over the counter at a pharmacy. Patches release nicotine slowly throughout the day, either over 16- or 24-hours, and are attached once a day. Highly dependent smokers can use more than one patch a day and/or supplement the patches with intermittent NRT.



Obtaining patches by prescription reduces the cost of patches to the standard monthly prescription cost of \$36.10 per month. This requires a consultation with a doctor and entrance into a comprehensive support and counselling program (e.g. through Quit Tasmania's Quitline).

b. Intermittent NRT

These products include gum, lozenges, tablets and inhalers. Their effects last a relatively short period of time, and they need to be taken regularly throughout the day. Intermittent NRT products are available over the counter in pharmacies.



NRT is safe and effective, and potentially doubles the chance of a quit attempt being successful. It is recommended for all people who are nicotine dependent.

NRT is not recommended for use by people with sensitivity to NRT products and should not be used by people who are not tobacco users. There may be individual considerations in using NRT and people should consult with their doctor or pharmacist prior to using NRT, particularly if they have existing medical conditions or are taking other medications on a regular basis.

Your organisation should ensure that employees have consulted a doctor, pharmacist or other appropriate health professional before agreeing to subsidise the use of NRT.

If any side effects are experienced whilst taking NRT, it is recommended people stop use and consult a pharmacist or doctor. The pharmacist and pharmacy staff are also able to guide people as to which products to use, how much to use and how to use them correctly.

2. Non-NRT medication (Champix and Zyban)

These medications do not contain nicotine but act on nicotine receptors in the brain, causing a reduction in the withdrawal symptoms associated with smoking cessation. They are available after a medical consultation, under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS), at the standard prescription cost of \$36.10 per month, for a period of three months. The medication is taken once per day.

Highly dependent smokers can supplement Zyban with the use of intermittent NRT (see below).

Smoking cessation product costs

It is difficult to accurately estimate how much NRT will cost as this depends on the degree of dependence of each smoker, and whether they wish to cease smoking, or just use NRT to help with withdrawal symptoms during working hours.

Smokers making a quit attempt have three options available:

1. smoking cessation medication
2. nicotine patches
3. intermittent NRT.

Highly dependent smokers can use a combination of patches or medication (Zyban only) with intermittent NRT.

As a guide, estimated costs of NRT for smokers attempting to quit are shown in the table below, based on the following levels of dependence and likely need for NRT:

- Low nicotine dependence: prescription patch or 2 mg oral NRT (up to 20 pieces per day)
- Moderate nicotine dependence: prescription patch or 4 mg oral products (up to 10 pieces per day)
- High nicotine dependence: prescription patch plus 2 mg oral product (up to 10 pieces per day).

	Low dependence		Moderate dependence		High dependence
	Patches/medication only ¹	Intermittent NRT only ²	Patches/medication only ¹	Intermittent NRT only ²	Patches/medication and intermittent NRT combination
4 weeks supply	\$36.10	\$115.00	\$36.10	\$115.00	\$95.00
8 weeks supply	\$72.20	\$230.00	\$72.20	\$230.00	\$190.00
12 weeks supply	\$108.30	\$345.00	\$108.30	\$345.00	\$285.00

¹ Cost of patches and medication based on PBS prescription cost as at February 2013.

² Prices may vary according to brand.



The likely cost of subsidising the use of intermittent NRT by employees who wish to manage their withdrawal symptoms during working hours only would be:

- low/moderate dependence: 2 mg oral NRT (8 pieces per day) = \$50.00 per month
- high dependence: 4 mg oral NRT (8 pieces per day) = \$70.00 per month.

The cost of subsidising the use of non-NRT medication only would be the standard prescription cost of \$36.10.

Subsidising smoking cessation products

A number of decisions need to be made about the way your organisation will approach the subsidy of smoking cessation products.

- What subsidy will be provided?
 - Will the organisation subsidise all or part of the cost? If only part of the cost, your organisation may subsidise a proportion of the overall cost for each employee, or offer a maximum subsidy for each employee.
- How will the subsidy be provided?
 - Option 1: An account may be established with a local pharmacy where employees can obtain NRT or medication. Your organisation would then pay the pharmacy account as arranged. You may be able to negotiate a discount with a local pharmacy. The pharmacy would need to itemise purchases for each employee in order to monitor individual employee costs. This option would increase the likelihood of employees receiving advice from a pharmacist before and during product use.

- Option 2: Employees purchase products from their preferred pharmacy and submit receipts to your organisation on a regular basis for reimbursement. While this option provides greater flexibility for employees, it would require greater administrative resources and does not encourage employees to seek regular and appropriate advice about product use.
- For how long will smoking cessation products be subsidised?
 - It is generally accepted that products should be used to assist with smoking cessation for a minimum of eight to twelve weeks.

Informing employees about smoking cessation product subsidies

You can let your employees know about the organisation's intention to provide support using a variety of channels including email, noticeboards, attachments to payslips, items in staff meeting agendas and newsletter articles.

You could provide the following useful information to employees:

- who in the organisation to contact to obtain smoking cessation product support
- what level of subsidy will be provided
- how long the subsidy will be available
- what employees need to do to qualify for the subsidy
- how employees can obtain reimbursement for their product purchases.