

From a Landline to a Chatline: Exploring Alternatives for Cessation Counseling

Summary

For more than 25 years, the California Smokers' Helpline (Helpline) has provided free, telephone-based tobacco cessation counseling services for California residents. Quitting assistance is offered in English, Spanish, Mandarin, Cantonese, Vietnamese and Korean, as well as TDD. The Helpline was the nation's first statewide smoking quitline and by 2002, every state in the nation had adopted similar telephone services. However, as technology and communication preferences evolved, the Helpline's call volume declined. These changes propelled the Helpline to develop new cessation counseling methods. By diversifying how it delivers cessation support, the Helpline seeks to stay relevant to younger audiences. Currently the largest proportion of callers are women 45 to 64 years old. The Helpline aims to broaden its reach through innovation. The graphic below illustrates the progression of the rollout of Helpline modalities over the past eight (8) years. Online instructional videos are in development to share with Helpline clients.



Evaluation data reveals that tobacco users are engaging with the Helpline's new modalities over time. Moving forward, California's biggest challenges include promoting the new methods effectively and finding ways to assess quit status from users of the new methods without creating access barriers.

Results

Table 1 shows the number of clients reached via the Helpline's new modalities.

Timeframe	# Registered online	# Texting program sign-ups	# Texting program clients who also enrolled in counseling	# Online chat sessions completed	Average # active mobile app users per month (iOS & Android)
May 1, 2018 to April 30, 2019	1,907	1,960	424	755	289*
Rollout to April 30, 2018	10,225	5,015	769	1,694	52

*Data reflects a highly successful April-May 2019 Google Universal App Campaign (UAC) Android app promotion.

Table 2 shows the change in the number clients served by each modality over time. The percentage figure represents the percent of all clients served by that modality during the specified timeframe.

Timeframe	Online Regis. n/%	Texting Program n/%	Online Chat n/%	iOS App n/%	Android App n/%	Telephone n/%
May 1, 2010 to April 30, 2011	47/0.14%					32,084/99%
May 1, 2012 to April 30, 2013	781/2%					36,759/96%
May 1, 2014 to April 30, 2015	1,873/4%	307/0.6%				47,359/94%
May 1, 2016 to April 30, 2017	1,224/4%	714/2.5%	457/24%			24,477/85%
May 1, 2018 to April 30, 2019	1,581/4%	1,872/4.5%	736/1.8%	654/1.6%	15,655/37.3%*	19,241/46%

*Data reflects a highly successful April-May 2019 Google Universal App Campaign (UAC) Android app promotion. Percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding.

Challenges

The Helpline experienced challenges related to the development, launch, adoption and evaluation of the new cessation modalities.

Development:

- Changing the organizational mindset of the Helpline staff to shift from a telephone-based approach to one that includes new technologies and multiple channels of service.
- Integrating the new modalities into a unified reporting system capable of tracking each client across diverse technology platforms.
- Maintaining existing Helpline operations (e.g., client management system, telephone operations, technological support) while simultaneously developing new modalities increased development and launch timelines.

Launch:

- Decisions about the optimal timing of marketing the new methods delayed promotional efforts. For example, the Helpline wanted to implement more efficient enrollment processes for texting (text to text) prior to promoting the service.

Adoption:

- Adoption by clients of the alpha version of the mobile apps during the soft launch was slower than anticipated.

Evaluation:

- The new modalities are designed to minimize barriers to use (i.e., no formal intake process) which makes it difficult to assess their impact on quitting.

Solutions

Development:

- Allocate staffing and funds to support advances in technology.

Adoption:

- Since the new modalities are designed to be appealing to younger audiences, the marketing of text and apps will be targeted to this population through digital advertising and with social media through segmentation and the use of images that are relatable to target populations.
- Boost adoption of the apps through Google UAC promotions.
- Promote the new methods extensively in an ongoing fashion through multiple means, including with stakeholder groups, on webinars, and on the Helpline website.

Evaluation:

- Create a customer-journey platform across modalities that covers the client experience of registering, counseling, and viewing supplemental materials.
- Program “quick feedback” surveys into current modalities to assess quit attempts and solicit client feedback.
- Continue making adjustments in existing modalities to improve client services and impact assessment.
- Inject data analytics into all possible activities to better track usage and client experiences.

Sustaining Success

Strategies to expand use of these new tools for cessation support and to address key challenges, include: 1) building in methods to evaluate impact on quitting, for example, implementing quick polling of mobile app users to see if they have quit smoking; 2) regular reporting and examination of data analytics; 3) promoting the Helpline as a multi-channel service; 4) continuing to adapt to client communication preferences; and 5) employing a variety of marketing and promotional strategies to drive more engagement.

Contact Information

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