

# EMPLOYER CASE STUDY:

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# KHMS, SmartQuit, and the Affordable Care Act

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December 2015

SmartQuit<sup>®</sup>  
by 2Morrow

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Mobilizing Behavior Change

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# SMARTQUIT CASE STUDY

Kitsap Mental Health Services

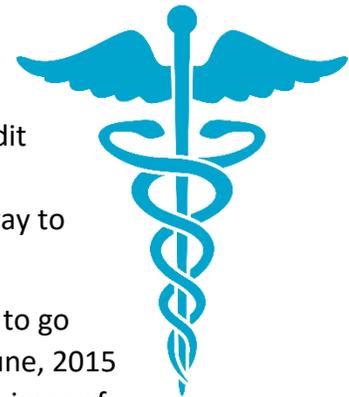
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## The Organization

Kitsap Mental Health Services (KMHS) is a private, not-for-profit community mental health center that provides both mental health and behavioral health care services in Kitsap County, WA. As a nonprofit, KMHS key tenets include serving their population and prudent fiscal management. Kitsap has about 340 employees who are covered by their health plan including psychiatrists, nurse practitioners, nurses, therapists, care coordinators, support staff, life coaches and operations staff.

## The Challenge

Under the Affordable Care Act (ACA), employers may charge employees who use tobacco products an additional surcharge or credit those who do not use tobacco<sup>1</sup>. But, ACA guidelines also state that employers need to offer a “reasonable alternative” to quitting as a way to receive the non-smoker rates<sup>2</sup>.



In fall of 2014, Kitsap Mental Health Services (KMHS) decided to go smoke free. Smoking would be prohibited on all campuses starting June, 2015 and a significant non-smoker discount on their health insurance premiums of \$100 per month would begin September 1, 2015. To comply with the ACA guidelines and to help their employees quit smoking, Kitsap Mental Health Services started researching smoking cessation programs. Most of the smoking cessation programs they found were too costly and with limited budget they were not feasible. Free resources did not provide good data or validation of completion and HIPAA requirements were also considered.

## A Creative Solution

In early 2015, an employee sent Human Resources a news article about SmartQuit, a new evidence based program that was seeking employers and smokers for an additional study. KMHS contacted their Benefit Broker, who in turn contacted 2Morrow Inc. and after a review of

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<sup>1</sup> "Tobacco Surcharges - American Lung Association." 2015. 3 Dec. 2015  
<<http://www.lung.org/assets/documents/tobacco/factsheet-tobacco-surcharges-v2.pdf>>

<sup>2</sup> "How the Affordable Care Act Affects Tobacco Use and Control." 2014. 3 Dec. 2015  
<[http://publichealthlawcenter.org/sites/default/files/resources/tclc-fs-aca-&-tobacco-control-2014\\_0.pdf](http://publichealthlawcenter.org/sites/default/files/resources/tclc-fs-aca-&-tobacco-control-2014_0.pdf)>

the program, KMHS chose to participate in the study which offered the program free to those who were interested.

Once the study was over, KMHS evaluated participant feedback, usage data, reporting, and costs and decided to offer SmartQuit as part of their employee benefit package. Promotion began during open enrollment, starting August, 2015. In order to receive the non-smoker rates, Kitsap Mental Health Services decided that each employee and covered spouse/domestic partner needed to sign an affidavit stating they are tobacco free for 90 days or a current smoker. The default if they didn't sign was the smoking rate. For employees who smoked, Kitsap offered the SmartQuit program as their "reasonable alternative standard" which provided smokers with help for quitting and met ACA requirements. Smokers had the option to enroll and complete the SmartQuit program (earning a Certificate of Completion) to receive the nonsmoker rates for the next year. Human resources then verified program completion on their administrator dashboard. In order to receive the non-smoker rates, employees needed to complete the program by mid-November.



*"The ability to monitor staff's success via the website allowed me to share statistics with executive leadership and the Board." – Beki Lischalk, CHRO, KMHS*

Knowing that employees who smoked were upset about the new smoking rates, Beki Lischalk, the Chief Human Resources Officer, decided to make sure all staff knew about the alternative standard option. Announcements about the pending premium contribution change began in March 2015. Working with her broker and 2Morrow, Beki created a communication plan. It started with clear information in their yearly benefits slide deck about the new surcharge, including how employees could meet the alternative standard by completing the SmartQuit program. KMHS's benefits provider included a description of the SmartQuit program, how to sign up, and the completion deadline in their open enrollment documents, on their health care rates page, and on the tobacco affidavit. In addition, Beki sent weekly emails to employees about how to sign up for SmartQuit and announcing how many staff had completed the program and returned to non-smoker rates. She posted flyers (provided by 2Morrow) around all their offices, had a SmartQuit display at the employee health fair, and added information to New Employee Orientations.

The Chief Human Resources Officer began accessing SmartQuit's reporting dashboard and giving regular progress reports to the CEO and the Board HR Committee. She also added the number of activations and program completions in the weekly emails, sharing words of praise and encouragement to their program participants. She started to receive positive feedback from employees on their efforts to quit.

*“I was very excited about the SmartQuit program when I read the article sent to me by one of our nurses. As a nonprofit organization, my excitement grew when I learned about the program’s effectiveness and cost when compared to other smoking cessation programs. The ability to monitor staff’s success via the website allowed me to share statistics with executive leadership and the Board. My excitement continues to this day as we offer our new staff the same opportunity.”*

– Beki Lischalk, Chief Human Resources Officer, Kitsap Mental Health Services

## Results

KMHS was able to affordably meet the ACA requirements and offer support for their employees. The data dashboard provides real time insights that helped them manage the campaign and better support employees. The following are some insights from the dashboard as well as 2Morrow’s reporting resources.

### Adoption: 40% of Smokers

- 33 smokers took advantage of the program. Given the national smoking rate of 16% and an adjustment for spouses, 2Morrow estimates about 82 smokers in the target population.
- 5 of the 33 participants used a workbook version of the SmartQuit program.

### Engagement<sup>3</sup>:

- 28 participants used the app 940 times (average of 33.5 times per participant).
- 85% of smokers who completed the program continued to use the app after earning their Certificate of Completion. This is much higher than expected.

### Completion:

- 85% of smokers who signed up for the program completed it (earning their credit).
- 18% of participants recorded smoke free days in the app. This is an optional tracking option and not all participants use it.

Continued use after receiving the incentive suggests the program continues to have value for participants. SmartQuit users have access to the program for 6 months, which supports new quitters and those that were not yet successful.



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<sup>3</sup> Workbook participants not included.

*"I'm 125 days smoke free because of SmartQuit. Every morning, I open the app and track yesterday's smoke free day and my urges. Then, anytime I have an urge, I open the app and pick an exercise to read through and practice. The mindfulness approach worked really well for me and the reminders helped me stick with the program." – Tony A., KMHS*

## Lessons Learned

### Internal Support & Promotion is Critical for Participation

Probably the greatest takeaway from this launch of SmartQuit is how important support from the Human Resources department and Management is for participation. Active promotion, through emails and presentations from HR, had the greatest impact on signup and completion rates. Posters and information in benefits materials, such as on the affidavit, helped with general employee awareness. The Chief Human Resources Officer said that several employees contacted her about the new policy and were pleased to hear there was an alternative. Previously, HR did not have access to smoking cessation program reporting and they believe their ability to track employee participation has made it easier to increase engagement. Also, by adding the SmartQuit information to their tobacco affidavit employees were able to easily access the information. The affidavit stated that employees may be disciplined for falsifying the form and offering an alternative helped with honesty about their tobacco use.

*"I'm 125 days smoke free because of SmartQuit"*  
– Tony A. KMHS

### Participants liked the App-based Program, but not everyone had a Smartphone

While participants liked the convenience of an app, not everyone has a smartphone. Five smokers needed alternative options. KMHS wanted to offer the same program to all employees, so they contacted 2Morrow for a solution. 2Morrow provided a physical workbook version of SmartQuit to satisfy the need. Four of the five workbook participants completed the program.

### Incentives Encourage Program Completion

Human Resources had a negative response from employees when the increase in healthcare monthly premiums was announced. Smokers felt singled out by the increased costs and questioned why other health risks, such as being overweight, were not raising rates. Choosing a smoking cessation program that appealed to employees was an important step to keep relations positive. By offering SmartQuit as an alternative, KMHS was able to support their smokers during a difficult transition without sacrificing their dedication to health. Nearly 85% of

KMHS SmartQuit participants have completed the program so far and we can assume this was because of the large financial incentive.

## Approach - Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)

As a mental health services organization, the theory behind SmartQuit was of interest to the staff. The ACT-based program used in SmartQuit was developed by Dr. Bricker at Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center and teaches smokers a different way of dealing with the urge to smoke. The approach is very non-judgmental and values based which aligns well with the work being done at KMHS. Feedback from Kitsap Mental Health Services' employees reinforce that the program does appeal to smokers for its convenience as well as its innovative and non-judgmental approach.

## Conclusion

Offering an alternative standard with a newly implemented tobacco surcharge and/or when moving to a smoke free campus as well as fulfill ACA guidelines. Providing a smoking

*"I'm not sure I would have quit otherwise."  
– A KMHS SmartQuit User*

cessation program, like SmartQuit, can help employees quit smoking. Support from within the company is essential to program success and employee relations. Without HR's efforts to create awareness and provide positive encouragement, SmartQuit would not have such high adoption rates. Feedback from Kitsap Mental Health Services' employees reinforce that the program does appeal to smokers for its convenience as well as its innovative and non-judgmental approach.

*"At first, I didn't want to wait to go through the program. I wanted it all right now. But, in the end, I think slowing down and not completing it all in one day helped me quit. I'm not sure I would have quit otherwise. I spent more time with the exercises and really let them sink in. Now I'm smoke free!" – A SmartQuit User*

**About SmartQuit:** SmartQuit® is an evidence-based smoking cessation program that is 2-3 times more effective than trying to quit on your own and can be used with or without NRT. SmartQuit uses an Acceptance and Commitment (ACT) approach to quitting that is different from other programs. The program is delivered via a Smartphone app, so it is private, easy to use, and always within reach. SmartQuit delivers an 8 day program that is completed before your quit day and you also get up to 6 months of additional support, messages, and tools to support success. To learn more, visit [www.2Morrowinc.com](http://www.2Morrowinc.com).