

WORKPLACE IN FOCUS

CONSTRUCTION



BUILDING A HEALTHIER HEART:
**REDUCING TOBACCO USE AMONG
CONSTRUCTION WORKERS**

Introduction

For many construction workers, tobacco's impact on heart health is a pressing issue that only worsens over time. Fortunately, this problem is preventable and employers now have a crucial opportunity to take action. By addressing tobacco use, companies can improve their workers' health, reduce healthcare costs, and create a safer, more productive workplace.

Heart disease is a major drain on productivity, with U.S. employers losing a staggering \$36.4 billion annually due to workplace absenteeism. A key factor here is tobacco use, which not only harms cardiovascular health but also impacts mental well-being. The construction industry, known for its physically demanding work, faces a particularly high prevalence of tobacco use — now the highest across all sectors.

This challenge has only intensified in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, when *22% of construction workers tried tobacco for the first time*. But here's the good news: **employers have a unique opportunity to address these health concerns head-on**, empowering their workforce and fostering a culture of wellness that boosts both health and productivity.



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THE CHALLENGE:

TOBACCO USE AND HEART HEALTH IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

Tobacco use remains a major challenge in the construction industry, where about *34.3% of construction workers use tobacco products* — the highest rate of any sector. This is particularly concerning given the already demanding nature of the job, with workers facing significant physical and safety risks.

Estimated Prevalence of Current Tobacco Use by Industry Among Working Adults — National Health Interview Survey, United States, 2014-2016

Construction

34.3%

TOBACCO USE

Mining

30.4%

TOBACCO USE

Administrative & Support
and Waste Management

30.0%

TOBACCO USE

Accommodation and
Food Service

29.9%

TOBACCO USE

Manufacturing

27.3%

TOBACCO USE

Wholesale Trade

24.2%

TOBACCO USE

Real Estate and
Rental & Leasing

21.9%

TOBACCO USE

Education Services

11.0%

TOBACCO USE

Source: *Tobacco Use Among Working Adults — United States, 2014-2016* | MMWR

The health consequences of tobacco use are far-reaching, from increased heart disease and respiratory issues to mental health struggles. According to the American Heart Association, *cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in the United States*, with nearly 20% of those deaths attributed to smoking.

Global Ranking of Attributable Burden of Cardiovascular Diseases Due to Selected Modifiable Risk Factors

RANK	CAUSE OF DEATH	NUMBER OF DEATHS IN 2021 (95% UI)	NUMBER OF DALYS (95% UI)
1	High Systolic Blood Pressure	10.8M (9.15M - 12.1M)	209M (172M - 236M)
2	Dietary Risks	6.58M (2.27M - 9.52M)	142M (45.3M - 200M)
3	High Low-Density Lipo-Protein Cholesterol	3.81M (2.17M - 5.42M)	86.3M (54.1M - 115M)
4	Ambient Particulate Matter Pollution	3.13M (2.31M - 3.93M)	62.5M (45.7M - 78.4M)
5	Smoking	2.37M (498k - 4.41M)	59.6M (13.1M - 107M)
6	High Fasting Plasma Glucose	2.3M (2.03M - 2.65M)	41.2M (36.6M - 47.6M)
7	High Body Mass Index	1.95M (1.12M - 2.91M)	43.9M (23.8M - 65.4M)
8	Kidney Dysfunction	1.87M (1.44M - 2.34M)	38.2M (30.7M - 45.9M)
9	Household Air Pollution From Solid Fuels	1.61M (904k - 2.82M)	36.2M (21.2M - 61.1M)
10	Lead Exposure	1.57M (-139k - 3.17M)	29.7M (-2.78M - 61.2M)

Source: *The Global Burden of Cardiovascular Diseases and Risk: A Compass for Future Health* | *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*



PRACTICAL STEPS FOR ADDRESSING TOBACCO USE AND HEART HEALTH

We understand that tackling tobacco use and heart health issues requires more than just offering generic advice—it demands actionable, employee-focused solutions. The CDC reports that *67.7% of tobacco smokers desire to quit*. By promoting company resources that support cessation efforts, employers can help employees achieve their goals. This fosters a healthier workforce and improves overall well-being.

HERE ARE FOUR PRACTICAL STEPS HR LEADERS CAN IMPLEMENT RIGHT AWAY:

Evaluate and Enhance Mental Health Benefits: Mental health and physical health are deeply connected, and for many workers, tobacco use serves as a way to cope with stress. To tackle this issue, consider enhancing your mental health benefits by offering virtual therapy services or expanding access to Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs). Providing confidential, easily accessible support can make a significant difference, helping employees manage stress more effectively, quit tobacco use, and improve their overall well-being.

Leverage Carrier-Specific Resources: Take advantage of the resources offered by your health carriers. Many provide nicotine cessation programs and counseling designed to give employees the targeted support they need to quit smoking or using other tobacco products. By connecting your workforce to these resources, you can help them take the first step toward better health while also cultivating a supportive environment that promotes long-term well-being. It's a win-win for both employees and employers.

Promote Tobacco Cessation Programs with No-Cost Resources: We provide a range of valuable resources to help HR leaders promote tobacco cessation programs. From webinars and email templates to targeted communication campaigns designed specifically for the construction industry; these tools are ready to use. By leveraging these resources, HR leaders can raise awareness and inspire employees to take action, making it easier for them to start their journey toward quitting tobacco and improving their health.

Develop a Culture of Health and Wellness: While offering individual resources is essential, building a broader culture of health in the workplace is key to long-term success. Regular wellness initiatives, like on-site health checks and heart health awareness campaigns, can significantly boost employee engagement and promote a healthier, more productive environment.

THE HUMAN IMPACT OF SUCCESSFUL HR INITIATIVES

The success of tobacco cessation programs isn't just measured by reduced absenteeism or lower healthcare costs—it's about the transformative impact on employees' lives. For example, companies implementing comprehensive wellness initiatives see higher employee engagement and satisfaction levels. When workers feel supported in their efforts to improve their health, they are more likely to be productive, loyal, and present.

STRATEGIC TOOLS FOR EMPLOYEE RETENTION, ATTRACTION, AND ENGAGEMENT

In today's competitive job market, the benefits you offer are more than just perks — they are essential tools for attracting, retaining, and engaging your workforce. By investing in comprehensive employee benefits that support both mental and physical health, companies position themselves as employers of choice, creating a more attractive environment for top talent.

As HR leaders, you have the power to unlock the potential of your workforce by addressing tobacco use and heart health head-on. With the right resources and support, you can create a healthier, more engaged workforce, reduce absenteeism, and lower healthcare costs.



CONCLUSION

Tobacco cessation programs, wellness initiatives, and heart health resources are all part of a broader strategy to engage and empower employees in their own well-being. When employees feel supported in improving their health, they are more likely to stay with their employer long-term, reducing turnover and increasing engagement.

We are committed to supporting you every step of the way, offering practical solutions and resources that help you invest in the well-being of your employees. We invite you to connect with us to explore our employee benefits packages and discuss how we can support your organization's wellness goals. **Together, we can create a healthier future for your workforce and your business.**





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SOURCES

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- [Adult Smoking Cessation — United States, 2022 | MMWR](#)

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