



News Release

For Immediate Release
November 20, 2013

Media Contact: Phyllis Jones, Public Information Officer
(202) 673.1937 desk (202) 631-3077 mobile

Great American Smokeout Aims to Curb Smoking

Call 1-800-Quit Now to Get Help

Washington, DC—The District of Columbia Department of Behavioral Health is sponsoring a Great American Smokeout on Thursday, November 21, 2013 to promote smoking cessation and offer help to smokers who want to quit. Held on National Great American Smokeout Day, the event features speakers from anti-smoking organizations and entertainment from smoking prevention youth groups and starts at 5 pm, at the Marshall Heights, Lloyd D. Smith Building, 3939 Benning Road, NE.

The damaging health consequences of tobacco use are well known. Yet, tobacco use remains the single largest preventable cause of disease and premature death in the country. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), about 106,000 District residents smoke, and each year more than 700 will die from diseases directly related to cigarette smoking. An estimated 443,000 Americans die each year.

“People living with mental illness are twice as likely to smoke as other people, and studies show that people with a mental illness die 25 years earlier than their counterparts.” said Stephen T. Baron, Director of the Department of Behavioral Health.

Quitting smoking is hard. The Department of Behavioral Health offers a comprehensive smoking prevention and cessation program that can increase the chances of quitting and staying quit. Certified cessation counselors are available 24 hours a day to talk about a plan to quit or how to help a family member or friend quit. Call 1-800-Quit Now (1-800-784-8669) or Spanish-speaking callers can call (202) 333-4488. Nicotine replacement patches or lozenges are available to callers 18 years or older while supplies last.

The Department of Behavioral Health participates in the DC Tobacco Free Coalition, made up of 30 health, faith-based and community organizations, which works to promote smoke-free policies and anti-tobacco activities.

In addition, the Department supports strong prevention and smoking cessation activities targeted at youth. It supports the DC Anti-Tobacco Youth Coalition and Teens Who Don't to raise awareness of the health dangers of smoking and design prevention strategies tailored to youth.

“The best way to protect against the health risks of smoking is to not start smoking,” said Stephen T. Baron, Director of the Department of Behavioral Health. “We are reaching young people to help them make the decision not to start smoking or to quit now to avoid a future of health-related illnesses and possible premature death.”

Research shows that the body begins to heal itself as soon as the last cigarette is smoked. After twenty minutes, the heart rate and blood pressure drop. In two weeks, the lungs begin to work better. After five years, the risk of stroke goes down, and after 15 years of not smoking, the risk of heart disease is that of a nonsmoker.

“We want to challenge smokers to give up smoking for one day during the Great American Smokeout to begin a lifetime of healthier living. And, if you have mental illness and smoke, it’s important to work with your mental health provider to develop a strategy to stop smoking now to see health benefits right away,” said Baron.

Saint Elizabeths Hospital, the District’s psychiatric facility, is a smoke-free facility.

Sponsored by the American Cancer Society, the idea for the Great American Smokeout grew out of an event in 1970 when Arthur P. Mullaney challenged the citizens of Randolph, Massachusetts, to give up cigarettes for the day and donate the saved money to a high school scholarship fund. The first Great American Smokeout was held by the American Cancer Society in 1976 in California. Since then, events have been held across the country to draw attention to the deaths and chronic diseases caused by smoking and to encourage smokers to quit or develop a plan to quit.

For information about available mental health and substance abuse services, go to www.dbh.dc.gov.