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Cigarette Smoking in a Sample of Younger and Older Adult Managed Care Enrollees

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Background: In recent years, there has been a significant rise in cigarette smoking among 18 to 24 year olds and the problem is particularly acute in Minnesota with smoking rates in this age group among the highest in the nation. However, very little is known about the smoking habits, quitting interests, or use of cessation services among this group of smokers compared with older smokers.

Methods: We conducted a cross-sectional survey to identify smokers among a sample of younger and older adult HealthPartners enrollees. Enrollees were stratified by younger and older age groups and a random sample of 5580 younger (18 to 24 years old) enrollees and 4420 older (25 to 65 years old) enrollees were selected as the study sample. The primary purpose of the baseline survey was to identify smokers within our population of enrollees. Those who indicated they had smoked more than 100 cigarettes or smoked in the past 30 days, were asked about previous quit attempts, interest in quitting, and nicotine dependence. Adjusted response rates for younger adults was 69% and for older adults 79%.

Results: Approximately 24.5% of 18 to 24 year old respondents and 17% of 25 to 65 year olds report regular smoking. Among current smokers, those 18-24 years are less likely than those 25-65 years to be daily smokers, report smoking a pack or more a day, and report smoking within 5 minutes of awakening. Younger adults were more likely than older adults to report having one or more quit attempts in the past year. There appears to be a great deal of interest in cessation among the younger group of smokers with 54% reporting a previous quit attempt and 52% seriously considering quitting in the next 6 months.

Conclusions: By comparing the smoking habits and cessation preferences of younger and older adult smokers, this study will help to define the smoking problem among young adult enrollees and to identify the best methods for assisting and reaching young adult smokers to quit.