

NACDD Healthy Military Partnership Highlight: Engaging Florida Recruiters to Refer to Tobacco Free Florida Quit Services

Oct. 2021



At-A-Glance

The Florida Building Healthy Military Communities (FL-BHMC) pilot is partnering with the Florida Department of Health's (FDOH) Tobacco Free Florida (TFF) to engage military branch recruiters in helping new recruits quit using tobacco before they enter service and to stay quit once they enter.

Challenge

Service members face unique pressures that may compel tobacco use such as access to low-cost tobacco products, stress, and military culture.^{1,2} These factors influence new recruits' tobacco use behaviors as well.

Approach

Military recruiters provide information about military service, career opportunities, and training to people who are interested in joining the military. Recruiters perform an array of duties including interviewing, screening, testing, and counseling possible candidates. They also can host events or create programs to help candidates get ready for boot camp. As such, recruiters are ideal individuals not only to help prepare candidates for service, but also to counsel new recruits on the benefits of becoming and staying tobacco-free.

The FL-BHMC and FDOH team want to develop a referral network between recruiters and TFF cessation services that will connect recruits who use tobacco to the cessation services that TFF provides. They also plan to ask recruiters to encourage new recruits to remain tobacco free once they reach their duty stations.

In Fall 2020, the team organized a virtual, state-wide learning opportunity for TFF service providers, recruiters, and military leadership to increase awareness of the problem and to lay the foundation for partnership efforts.

NACDD Healthy Military Partnership Highlights feature new relationships or projects between public health and military stakeholders.

NACDD will follow these partnerships and share progress and successes. Learn more at chronicdisease.org.

¹ Nelson JP, Pederson LL. Military tobacco use: a synthesis of the literature on prevalence, factors related to use, and cessation interventions. *Nicotine Tob Res* 2008; 10:775–90.

² Haddock CK, Hyder ML, Poston WS, Jahnke SA, Williams LN, Lando H. A longitudinal analysis of cigarette prices in military retail outlets. *Am J Public Health* 2014;104: e82–7

The webinar reviewed the prevalence of tobacco use in the military, its impact on Service member readiness to deploy, and the cost to the Department of Defense to treat tobacco-related medical care, including lost workdays. It also presented TFF “Quit Your Way” services.

Lessons Learned

While the webinar was well-attended, most attendees were TFF service providers, health department staff, and tobacco partner organizations. While FDOH has well-established networks the FL-BHMC is still building its military partnership networks. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the FL-BHMC state coordinator was unable to continue face-to-face partnership development and was limited to sending emails through existing networks. The FL-BHMC and FDOH team will incorporate the following valuable lessons learned thus far into their continued efforts:

- Gaining military leadership buy-in is crucial.** The FL-BHMC state coordinator did not have ready access to recruiter contact information across branches. With the number and varied locations of recruiters across the state, approaching them one at a time is not an effective approach. Additionally, individual recruiters may not say yes to collaboration attempts from outside partners unless direction or endorsement comes from their leadership. The FL-BHMC state coordinator found that emphasizing the impact of tobacco use on mission readiness can increase buy-in even in the absence of leadership endorsement.
- Finding military contacts is a process.** The FL-BHMC state coordinator did not have adequate time to engage leadership or schedule in-person meetings to build the necessary relationships; as such, she focused on strengthening her current partnership networks and using their collective voice to reach recruiting offices. The partners she found most receptive to initial outreach efforts were the [National Guard Family Programs](#) and [Army Reserve Family Programs](#). See the callout box to the right for strategies to initiate partnerships with these programs in your state.

Strategies for Integrating Cessation with National Guard and Army Reserve Family Programs

Each Service branch has some form of family support program. These programs support and enhance quality of life and mission readiness for the military family.

Family support programs can be effective connectors for public health disease prevention and wellness efforts because of their purpose and unique connections to the military family.

Steps to Identify and Connect:

- National Guard:** Perform a quick web search for your state plus “National Guard Family Programs.” Each state offers different information on their site, but an ideal first connection is the Program Director/Coordinator for the program.
- Army Reserve:** Army Reserve: Refer to the list of the [state Program Directors](#).

Tips for Success:

- Ask senior staff in your agency to make the initial contact to reinforce the importance of this overall work.
- During your first meeting, lead with your desire to support Service member and family health and to learn more about the current needs. Approaching with your programs first—even if supported by data—may put off your potential collaborator. Offer your programs and initiatives after learning about their needs and based on any additional information they share (i.e., think of the community-based participatory model).

- **Use collective impact principles to increase reach.** Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the FL-BHMC state coordinator began building and convening regional networks to connect military service organizations and programs with civilian resources. She found this approach helpful because it addressed localized needs and allowed partners to align agendas. This can serve as an ideal space to push out the recruiter initiative.

Next Steps



At the state level, the FL-BHMC and FDOH team will continue their efforts to engage recruiters in tobacco prevention and cessation activities. To test the development of a statewide referral network, they are partnering with the Tobacco Free Jacksonville coalition to pilot a referral program regionally.

The coalition will develop and fund a marketing campaign to support the network and incorporate messaging for youth who desire to join the military.

If successful in the greater Jacksonville area, the FL-BHMC and FDOH team will consider moving forward with a statewide referral network.

The “Connecting Public Health to Department of Defense’s Building Healthy Military Communities” project is supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$100,000 with 100 percent funded by CDC/HHS. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by CDC/HHS, or the U.S. Government.

