STOP SMOKING INEQUALITIES
CANCER RESEARCH UK REPORT

Smoking is the biggest cause of preventable illness and avoidable death in the UK. It’s also the leading cause of health inequalities, accounting for around half the difference in life expectancy between the richest and poorest groups in society.

Stop Smoking Services (SSS) have played an important role in reducing smoking rates. However, in recent years, reductions to the Public Health Grant have led to a reduction in the provision and uptake of Stop Smoking Services across the UK. In England, half of all local authorities cut funding for SSS in 2017.

Reducing health inequalities is a key priority for the UK Government. We want to make sure that the UK can tackle the health inequalities caused by smoking and our research shows that SSS have an important part to play in this process.

Cancer Research UK commissioned the University of Edinburgh to carry out a review of socioeconomic inequalities and smoking cessation interventions in the UK. The research aimed to increase the understanding of how SSS can be best designed and delivered to reduce inequalities in smoking.

Key findings of the research:

• There has been no reduction in UK smoking inequalities in recent years.
• Since 2012, fewer smokers are attempting to quit with the support of Stop Smoking Services across the UK, a reduction most distinct in England. This is a likely consequence of cuts to public health funding and the move of SSS commissioning from the NHS to local authorities, which has created a disconnect in the referral process in many areas.
• Smokers from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds are more likely to access a Stop Smoking Service, but are less likely to be successful in their quit attempt. This is due to the additional barriers they face to quitting, such as higher dependence levels, positive smoking social norms and challenging life circumstances.
• The health service plays an important role in addressing health inequalities. The study shows that primary care and maternity services can be important in offering direct quit support and referring low SES smokers to Stop Smoking Services, therefore increasing the number of low SES smokers that quit.

For more information, contact LocalEngagement@cancer.org.uk or 020 3469 8360
• Several promising interventions have been used to support low SES smokers in their quit attempt. For example, financial incentives, tailored advice matched to literacy levels and mobile or outreach services. These have the potential to increase the chances of low SES smokers being successful in their quit attempt.

Our recommendations:

Stop Smoking Services have significant potential to reduce the health inequalities caused by smoking. Therefore, it is crucial that national and local governments invest in tobacco control, including SSS, and support them to target and tailor their offering to low SES smokers. Below are our recommendations for both national and local government.

We would like the UK Government to:

• Reverse cuts to the Public Health Grant, to prevent further budget cuts to tobacco control and SSS in England.
• Find a sustainable solution for funding Stop Smoking Services in the long-term, including looking to the tobacco industry to make a greater contribution to the healthcare costs caused by smoking.

We would like local authorities in England to:

• Prioritise and sustain funding for tobacco control, including Stop Smoking Services. Continued and protected investment can save lives and money in the longer term.
• Ensure Stop Smoking Services proactively target low SES smokers in the local area with tailored support, to increase uptake.
• Work in tandem with local health services, including primary care and maternity services, to increase referrals into Stop Smoking Services, particularly for low SES smokers.
• Implement monitoring and evaluation of the above measures in line with NICE guidance NG92.

If we are to reach a smokefree generation - where less than 5% of the adult population smoke across all socioeconomic groups - we must tackle health inequalities. As this report shows, a targeted approach to supporting the least affluent smokers is a highly effective solution.

For more information, contact LocalEngagement@cancer.org.uk or 020 3469 8360