



Partner Spotlight

NORTHERN KY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Northern Kentucky Health Department (NKY Health) has seen great success in their mission to “prevent disease, promote wellness and protect against health threats.” This includes their work to address tobacco treatment and tobacco free policy efforts within the behavioral health organizations in their community. NKY Health is partnering with the Behavioral Health Wellness Environments for Living and Learning (BH WELL) research team to support behavioral health organizations in advancing tobacco-free policy and tobacco treatment services for people living with mental or behavioral health challenges who want to stop tobacco use.

People living with mental illness or a substance use disorder who use tobacco die 10-25 years earlier than those not living with mental illness or a substance use disorder who do not use tobacco. Also, they are more likely to experience depression and anxiety, substance use problems, and cardiovascular and/or cardiopulmonary problems. Additionally, people living with mental illness or a substance use disorder who use tobacco are more likely to die by suicide. Provision of tobacco treatment services has a positive impact on the health outcomes of people living with mental and behavioral health challenges.

With funding from the Northern Kentucky Agency for Substance Abuse Policy (NKY ASAP), NKY Health coordinates a No Cost Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) program. This initiative provides free NRT through locally owned pharmacies in Northern Kentucky, to people who want to stop tobacco use. The program centers around relationship building. “The free NRT program is very attractive...” shares Matt Hawkins, a tobacco prevention health educator with NKY Health. “A box of NRT can be 50 or 60 dollars.” Providing NRT at no cost allows access to everyone.

Tobacco treatment classes offered by NKY Health go hand-in-hand with the NRT program. This seamless approach to tobacco treatment allows greater access to resources for those who want to stop tobacco use. Richmond Amankwah, a tobacco prevention health educator with NKY Health, shares, “We know people have busy lives. We want to be there for our community in the ways they need.”

Another key component of serving the mental and behavioral health population is ensuring tobacco free environments where clients receive mental and behavioral health services. Marsha Bach, programs director with NKY Health, explains that many people

do not understand the impact that policies may have on the behavioral health population. Therefore, NKY Health assists behavioral health organizations in adopting tobacco-free policies. Bach acknowledges that each organization has its own culture, "It's their journey and everyone's journey is going to be different."

NKY Health has built vital relationships with behavioral health organizations interested in working toward tobacco-free environments. Bach shared that the success of this work has been made possible through the support and collaboration from "our NKY ASAP Treatment Collaborative and the relationship we have built with BH WELL. We are always learning from BH WELL every time we have a conversation."

Dr. Zim Okoli, Executive Director of BH WELL, shares, "Our partnership with the Northern Kentucky Health Department is an example of collaborations that make a difference. By joining together and merging our expertise in public mental health education, research, and advocacy, we are slowly promoting pro-tobacco free cultures within mental and behavioral health organizations. Ultimately, our partnership will show that mental and behavioral health organizations which implement tobacco-free environments and support tobacco treatment are those that foster recovery, mental health, and the overall wellbeing of people living with mental and behavioral health challenges.

Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death among people living with mental illnesses and continues to take huge tolls on the lives of Kentuckians. The Northern Kentucky Health Department is making a difference.

Northern Kentucky Health Department Contact Information

Marsha Bach, CHES
Programs Manager

Email: marsha.bach@nkyhealth.org
Office Number: 859-363-2095

About BH WELL

Housed within the University of Kentucky College of Nursing, Behavioral Health Wellness Environments for Living and Learning (BH WELL) exists to promote behavioral health and wellness among individuals facing behavioral health challenges. The BH WELL research team members are experts in behavioral health integration and change. They provide the essentials of mental and behavioral health support: practice, research, education, scholarship and service. To learn more, visit www.bhwell.uky.edu.