



Partner Spotlight

FRANKLIN COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Franklin County Health Department's (FCHD) mission to "Prevent, Promote, and Protect" supports better health outcomes for their community. Specifically, their success in strengthening tobacco policy in the state of Kentucky places them in the spotlight. FCHD 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 dependence treatment services for individuals living with mental illness on their journey to stop tobacco use.

Tobacco dependence treatment services are critical because people living with mental illness are 2-3 times more likely to use tobacco than those living without mental illness. These individuals experience greater tobacco related morbidity and mortality, and are less likely to receive tobacco dependence treatment as compared to the general population. Most want to stop smoking but feel like they need more support. These individuals may require longer durations of treatment and higher doses of nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) and cessation medications. Tailored evidence-based assistance within their community can help. Therefore, it is important to have Tobacco Treatment Specialists (TTS) available at the community level.

A TTS uses a comprehensive approach to tobacco dependence treatment by combining pharmacological and behavioral treatment approaches while incorporating relapse prevention strategies. FCHD has two certified TTS's working to support tobacco dependence treatment services within behavioral health organizations. Jennifer Robinson, a Health Education Coordinator with FCHD since 2016, completed her TTS training in 2022. Born and raised in Franklin County, she became motivated to pursue TTS training because of her grandmother's smoking-related health problems.

She is driven by the hope of "helping one person quit smoking so that one less grandchild will have to lose their grandparent to smoking-related health issues." Regarding how TTS training impacts her work with the community, Jennifer shares, "I have been involved with facilitating Freedom from Smoking classes since 2016. However, I always felt like something was missing in my toolbox to be the most beneficial to my clients. The TTS training was an amazing opportunity to learn and practice techniques that would help better motivate clients as well as increase outreach to others in my community."

FCHD Health Education Director and TTS Debbie Bell shares, "Jennifer is so compassionate. She is not afraid to ask the difficult questions. And, she really listens." Debbie notes that having a second TTS on staff allows FCHD to embark on new partnerships with behavioral, mental health, and substance use disorder organizations. "When Jennifer first began creating a list of all of our (behavioral health) sites, we had no idea that there were so many in our community. We didn't know where to start. But having the opportunity to work with the BH WELL team was great. (They helped) us get our foot in the door and see resources we have here at the local level that our partners in mental and behavioral health may be able to utilize."

In 2020, Jennifer, Debbie, and the Franklin County Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnership (MAPP) Wellness Coalition made a goal to reach just one behavioral mental health substance use site. As of December 2022, they have partnered with 15 sites.

Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death among people living with mental illnesses (MI) and continues to take huge tolls on the lives of Kentuckians. The Franklin County Health Department (FCHD) is making a difference.

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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.