

# Estimating the Short-term Clinical and Economic Benefits of Smoking Cessation: Do We Have it Right?

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## [DISCLOSURES](#)

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The most recent data from the National Health Interview Survey, 2006, suggest that, relative to never smokers, current smokers take an excess of 2.8 sick days for males and 3.1 days for females.<sup>[69]</sup> By contrast, Fellows *et al.* assumed a 25% reduction in excess sick days for every year after quitting.<sup>[71]</sup> In the Javitz *et al.* model, absenteeism was reduced by the full differential amount in the first year after smoking cessation.<sup>[46]</sup> Another model assumed that the cost of absenteeism is 1% of a current smoker's salary.<sup>[48]</sup>

## Key Issues

- Cost-effectiveness models indicate that a US\$1 million investment in anti-tobacco education would save 7000 life years, making smoking cessation roughly ten-times more effective than other preventive therapies. Nevertheless, smoking-cessation therapy is inadequately covered by many USA public and private health insurance plans.
- Reasons for opposition to more comprehensive smoking-cessation therapy coverage by public and private payors may include perceived poor return on investment, as insurance beneficiaries switch plans on average every 2-3 years, and greater end-of-life costs when smoking-related mortality is reduced and former smokers live longer than they otherwise might.
- Although smoking cessation is clearly beneficial in the long run, little has been published about the short-term economic and clinical effects of a successful cessation attempt. Better data on the cost-effectiveness of smoking cessation could improve

coverage and access to smoking cessation interventions.

- Existing economic models of the short-term effects of smoking cessation have a few shortcomings, most notably a lack of good data on the short-term effects of smoking cessation on absenteeism and workplace productivity. In addition, existing studies have frequently been too short to see clear benefits.
- A short-term focus may lead to suboptimal investment in smoking cessation in the USA from a broader societal view. The policy and social welfare implications of focusing on the short term need to be carefully considered, given that smoking cessation is clearly cost effective in the long run.