

## TSET Better Health Podcast Transcript

### Episode 34: Taking Down Tobacco at Any Age

December 30, 2022

Summary: Smoking rates in Oklahoma are dropping to historic lows, but they continue to rank high among the 50 states and vaping is still a persistent problem, especially among youth. This TSET Better Health Podcast episode takes a look at efforts to lower tobacco and vape use in our state heading into 2023 with guests Matt Glanville of the American Cancer Society's Cancer Action Network, Paola Klein of the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline, and two eastern Oklahoma high school students who discuss their motivations for tackling tobacco and vape use in their local schools and communities.

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#### **[Theme music]**

James Tyree: Hello and welcome to the TSET Better Health Podcast. This is your host James Tyree, senior health communication consultant at TSET.

Dylan Jasna: And I am Dylan Jasna, a health communication manager here at TSET. I'm very happy to join you and our listeners today for another episode as 2022 draws to a close and a new year begins. I wish everyone a very happy and healthy 2023. What are you looking forward to, James?

J. Tyree: Good times with family and friends, and work at TSET should be exciting with growth of programs and staff. And personally, I always want to be healthy so I can enjoy work, play and everything else to the fullest, so I will recommit myself to healthy habits this year. And you, Dylan

D. Jasna: I'm super excited for 2023. It's going to be my one-year anniversary here at TSET and I'm so excited to be a part of this team. We've got a lot of great stuff ahead for our Shape Your Future Brand and Healthy Youth Initiative Brands. I'm just really excited to see all of the hard work come to fruition this year.

J. Tyree: Any age is right on the money. And we do mean money because smoking, chewing and vaping tobacco products costs Oklahomans billions of dollars each year in health care and loss-of-productivity costs.

D. Jasna: And we do mean any age, because today we will hear and learn from staff with the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline and the American Cancer Society's Cancer Action Network, who will tell us how we as individuals – and collectively as a state – can reduce the deadly impact of tobacco use. We'll also hear from two Oklahoma high school students who work with fellow teens to raise awareness about the harm of tobacco use, but especially vaping, and creating healthier environments at their schools.

J. Tyree: That's a great lineup. Let's begin with the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline, a foundational resource for Oklahomans who want to quit tobacco, and its longtime coordinator. Let's hear her name and how many years the Helpline has played a critical part in our state's health.

Paola Klein: It's Paola Klein and I am the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline Coordinator. Been here for a little over nine years.

So, the Oklahoma Tobacco helpline has been around for 19, we're going on 20, and we've served over 400,000 individuals. The helpline was one of the first programs that TSET funded and put out there. Knowing that what tobacco does to our health and to our state was one of the first things we needed to combat. And it has come a super, super long way. In the almost 10 years that I have been here I have watched it expand and grow.

J. Tyree: The Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline offers free coaching and nicotine replacement therapy – of NRT – to adults 18 and over who register. But beyond that, what has made this program so successful?

P. Klein: I think what has made it so successful is that we're starting to meet the tobacco user where they're at in their attempt at quitting, right? Are you gung-ho ready to go or do you need to maybe just come in, have a little chat, or just get a little bit of NRT to get started and then come back later when you're like, "Oh, right, I got my two weeks. I'm ready to talk to a coach and really do this." And that, I think, has been really helpful, meeting tobacco users where they're at. We need to understand that not everyone's at the same place in their quit. And being able to do that I think has really helped the program be successful, and most importantly, those who use the helpline to be successful.

J. Tyree: Recently, the Helpline had a limited-time offer of eight weeks of free nicotine replacement therapy in November, in line with the Great American Smokeout. How successful was that campaign?

P. Klein: So the limited time offer deal that we just had, I don't have all that information right now, but I can tell you when we did that back in the spring into the early summer, we saw folks coming in and really capitalizing on this opportunity to make a quit attempt when they didn't have to pay for eight weeks of nicotine replacement therapy. Overall registration went up by 31%. Yeah, that's huge. And another big number, I don't want to bore you guys with statistics, was that for first time callers, so people who've never ever called the helpline, we had a 35% increase of people capitalizing, taking advantage of this opportunity to quit by getting coaching and getting eight weeks of NRT. So, when I talk to people about NRT and the helpline, and what I say is like, "Listen, if I had all the money in the world, I'd give you all the NRT I could until you could quit."

J. Tyree: The eight weeks of NRT is over, so why contact the Helpline now or at any time?

P. Klein: So, I think a lot of tobacco users understand by now the health consequences of using commercial tobacco. One of the things that we need to also consider is why you might want to quit vaping as well. The health consequences are slowly coming to fruition. We're learning more each day. However, why you should quit is really a personal thing, right? I often tell when... In my previous work, I would always tell my patients, find that motivation, wear it on your shoulders. And it's like you have the angel on one side and the devil on the other side, and the devil being that craving that you want to give into. What is that angel on your one side saying to you? How is it helping you stick to your quit attempt? That's the little imagery or analogy of like to use when I was helping folks quit tobacco.

J. Tyree: What can we possibly look forward to at the Helpline in 2023, and do you have a final word of encouragement for our listeners?

P. Klein: I'm really looking forward that, hopefully, in 2023 and into the next fiscal year that we're going to have more live texting opportunities where our folks will actually get to text live with an individual, with a coach. And that's again, meeting people where they're at, right? And so that is something that we've been working really hard to get in place and offer to those trying to make a quit attempt.

I want folks to always know and remember that you can use us more than once. I think oftentimes participants either didn't get that information or don't think they can come back. You can come back and you can use the helpline twice in a 12 month period. So always call us, always go online or do what you need to do. And then the other thing, my other motto when it comes to quitting tobacco is, never quit quitting. You never know when that quit attempt could be your last one. So don't give up. This is when it's good to be a quitter. Don't give up. Never quit quitting.

(Music)

D. Jasna: The Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline is a tremendous resource for individual Oklahomans to quit tobacco and the toll it takes on their physical and financial health. But what efforts are happening at the wider statewide level in terms of advocacy? The American Cancer Society's Cancer Action Network is one agency leading that charge, and it's interesting to hear how they do that and what's in store for this year.

Matt Glanville: I am Matt Glanville. I am the Oklahoma and Arkansas Government Relations Director for the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network.

[00:39] The American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, or ACS CAN, is the advocacy arm of the American Cancer Society, and what that means is essentially that we are the lobbying wing of the organization and we lobby at the state, local, and federal level to reduce the burden of cancer, to reduce the burden of tobacco, and to increase access to care for all Oklahomans.

- D. Jasna: What are a couple of examples of cancer-prevention actions for which your agency advocated, and how did that go?
- M. Glanville: Well, one of the things that we do across all states, and our data show this to be one of the most effective things in reducing the toll of unnecessary death and disease due to tobacco, is to advocate for increases in tobacco taxes. I think that's a really good example of a major success that we've had in the State of Oklahoma in recent years, with \$1.50 increase in the tobacco tax that has been really effective in reducing the overall prevalence of tobacco use and specifically cigarette smoking in the State of Oklahoma, and I could also point to a couple ballot initiative successes that have been really effective in Oklahoma, including the expansion of Medicaid, which opened the door to access to care for as many as 200,000 low income Oklahomans, and in addition, State Question 814 a couple of years ago that protected funding for the Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust when the legislature was considering diverting it for other resources. Those are a few examples of successes that we've had and shaping legislation that can really save lives in the State of Oklahoma.
- D. Jasna: That's great, Matt. So what is ACS CAN working on for 2023?
- K. Hardin: We will have a couple of major initiatives that we're going to be working on in 2023. One of them is tobacco related. This is a perennial priority for ours, and we will be working to repeal tobacco pre-emption in Oklahoma. Pre-emption is the passage of laws at the state level which makes it illegal for lower levels of government, municipal governments, to enact stronger laws. This is a tobacco industry tactic that removes a community's right to enact local smoke-free air laws, basically.
- D. Jasna: Interesting, but why should we care about pre-emption? I mean, what effect does that have on any of us here in Oklahoma?
- M. Glanville: Well, it prevents cities and towns from enacting ordinances to ensure that they have 100% smoke-free places, workplaces, restaurants, bars. We believe at ACS CAN that all Oklahomans have a right to breathe clean smoke-free air and to be safe from cancer-causing secondhand smoke, and we certainly think that local communities are in a better place to be able to represent the interests of their constituents in many cases, and we want to give them that ability to enact those ordinances to protect the citizens of the State of Oklahoma from secondhand smoke.
- D. Jasna: On a personal level, why are you so involved in the Cancer Action Network? Why are you so committed to this work?
- M. Glanville: I think it's the sense of mission for one thing, generally speaking, and the fact that I get to get up every day and work on behalf of cancer survivors and their families in the State of Oklahoma, which is just highly motivating for me. As many of your listeners and you know, I'm sure, we are a volunteer driven organization, and I have the privilege of working closely with many of our volunteers who often happen to be cancer survivors,

and hearing their stories is very powerful, and it's often our best tool in the realm of advocacy. It always lets lawmakers know that our patients are not just statistics, and it gives them the opportunity to connect with people who make decisions that have powerful impacts on their day-to-day lives, so that's really what draws me to this agency and has kept me here.

D. Jasna: If others are inspired to join or assist in your agency's fight against cancer and harmful tobacco environments, how can they get involved?

K. Hardin: Sure. Well, I would just direct people to [fightcancer.org/ok](http://fightcancer.org/ok) and there are a number of ways there that you'd be able to get involved. You can volunteer with our organization. You can donate to our organization. In my opinion one of the most effective ways that people can get involved with ACS CAN and further our mission is to share their story, and there is an option there on the website for people who want to do that if they feel passionate about these issues. If they have a particular interest, we want to connect with them to make sure that their story and their message can be communicated with decision makers who have the ability to move the needle on these issues.

(Music)

J. Tyree: Quitting tobacco and taking on the tobacco industry is not just for adults. Youth engagement is another key part in lowering tobacco use and its harmful effects here in Oklahoma. The TSET Healthy Youth Initiative is composed of youth-oriented wellness programs and campaigns, and two teens from eastern Oklahoma spoke with us to explain how and why they are involved. Let's meet them!

M. Amezcua: My name is Mayra Amezcua. I am a sophomore and I go to Howe School.

L. Laymon: My name is Lacey Laymon, and I'm a junior and I go to Keys High School.

J. Tyree: We often hear that vaping is all too common among Oklahoma youth, but what do you see and hear in your school and community?

M. Amezcua: In my area. I think it's definitely around, like I see it spreading real quick, not only through high schoolers but all the way down to fifth graders I've heard of vaping. From my perspective, I see as many kids want to do it to get that numb feeling, that head high, to get them to stop thinking about their problems or anything that they're going through.

L. Laymon: From my perspective, personally, I think it's mostly because of peer pressure because it seems cool and everybody does it, so why wouldn't you want to do it is the main reason from my perspective and in my community.

J. Tyree: So you are involved in YAHL, which is Youth Action for Health Leadership and a part of the TSET Healthy Youth Initiative. Within that group, what do you do to let classmates know, hey, this is not good for you, and how do you let adults know what's going on?

L. Laymon: I've done mostly partner presentations, which is where we present to people in the community, and it's usually CounterAct Tobacco presentations. I've also done a table at a basketball game to collect surveys to present to legislators. ...

People are very responsive to it and they do ask a lot of questions. It's a lot of good questions, and I try to give my best answer.

J. Tyree: And for you, Mayra?

M. Amezcua: So as a part of CounterAct Tobacco, we collect surveys to learn what people think, we host events to educate the community and we do presentations to organizations to educate them and try to get them to sign and support us.

I think they're going pretty good. We've set up one time and we got quite a bit of results back, and we got to educate them and let them know that it's out there and most likely going to someday go into their kids. Hopefully not.

J. Tyree: Have your efforts sparked any change at your school?

L. Laymon: We haven't got to do a policy change yet, but we have advocated for vape detectors in the bathroom, not specifically through CounterAct, but it has helped us. A bunch of YAHL members went to our principal and was like, "Hey, this is a problem." He did put vape detectors in the bathroom, so that's one thing that YAHL, the statistics from it, helped us with. But again, we're also not only working for policy change in our schools, but also working for policy change in our state as state leaders. We're hoping to gather surveys and present it to state leaders in the future. We're helping protect kids through all kinds of policies like retail licensing.

J Tyree: Why did you decide to get involved in anti-tobacco and vaping efforts?

L. Laymon: Personally, I decided to join YAHL as a whole to make a difference in my community, my school, and the state, just to make a difference on nicotine products and help people. It's just an overall great organization to be a part of.

M. Amezcua: I joined just to see what difference I can make and to further my public speaking skills. ... I personally think it is, I mean I'm talking to adults, which mostly I wouldn't talk to, I would just stick to kids that I talk to around my age, but I think it's helping.

J. Tyree: How do you personally feel, or what do you think, when you see someone you know vaping or smoking?

M. Amezcua: It kind of disgusts me because sometimes they really don't know what's going inside of their lungs, but I can't really judge because I don't really know what they're going through and why they're using it, but whatever they're using it for, I think there is another solution than vaping.

- L. Laymon: I'm just kind of saddened by it, that they had to resort to vaping to solve their problems or help them think about things. I just try to educate them on why it's bad also, talk to them, and try and help them.
- J. Tyree: What advice would you give to parents and other adults when talking about vaping with a young one they care about?
- M. Amezcua: I personally think that parents should let their kids know that it's out there and the damages that it does to their lungs and let them know that they're there for them and that there's other solutions to make them happy or just to fulfill themselves.
- L. Laymon: Yes, I completely agree with what Myra says. Just try to educate them and just don't be completely angry if it's a kid, because sometimes they don't know any better, just educate them on why it's bad and how harmful it is for their future.
- J. Tyree: You are doing a lot of good for your peers, your schools and your communities through your involvement with YAHL, but how does the program benefit you and other members?
- L. Laymon: Personally, I think just YAHL is a great opportunity to further your future. It's great for college, it teaches you new skills for public speaking, like Myra says, and just how to talk to people in general. Also, it's just a very important program. We're advocating for kids who can't advocate for themselves and advocating for parents who have to deal with these vape products that their kids use.
- M. Amezcua: Personally, I really like YAHL because it stands for Youth Action for Health Leadership and the thing that really stuck out to me is that it's really youth led, like we have adults that are supporting us and that's really, like I say, it's not common around here anymore. Many adults don't support youth because we look at things from a different perspective and it's great to have somebody standing behind you letting you know that you're doing great, that you're going to make a difference.
- (music)
- D Jasna: That was a good interview with two very impressive high school students. I work with our health communication team and Rescue Agency on the TSET Healthy Youth Initiative, and I can tell you there are many teenagers like Mayra and Lacey who are doing amazing things to improve the health and well-being of their peers, schools and communities. Vaping is a problem in Oklahoma, and students like these play an important part in turning things around.
- J. Tyree: It takes people of all ages to create healthier environments for ourselves, our families and our communities. We want to thank our guests, Paola Klein of the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline, Matt Glanville of the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, and students Mayra Amezcua and Lacey Laymon for sharing their insights with us. And as always, we very much appreciate you, our listeners.

D. Jasna: Remember that you can always find our full podcast archive complete [00:10:00] with transcripts at [tset.ok.gov/podcast](http://tset.ok.gov/podcast). And please follow TSET on social media, @OklahomaTSET, to stay up to date. So until next time, I'm Dylan Jasna ...

J. Tyree: And James Tyree, wishing you peace ...

D. Jasna: And better health.