

Smoking cessation: a new approach

A new campaign is delivering real motivation and change for smokers based on an evidence-based digital coaching platform

EACH year, seven thousand Irish lives – the equivalent of 19 deaths each week – are lost to tobacco. The fact that most of these deaths are preventable underpins the ongoing challenge, moreover, the need to provide smokers with the support required to give up tobacco for good.

Behind the decision to smoke

A recent Opinion Matters poll of Irish adults revealed much about Irish smokers' attitudes to their tobacco addiction. Two-thirds of those questioned (65.6%) said that they felt their smoking was getting in the way of them being active, with 28% reporting that their habit prevented them from playing sports. This is concerning, as physical inactivity is a key risk factor for major noncommunicable diseases. Furthermore, 44% of Irish men and women admitted that smoking prevents them from feeling in control of their health.

Crucially, more than two-thirds of respondents (69.9%) stated that they would like to quit within a year, therefore, the need for support tools to help smokers achieve an active healthy 'smoke-free' life is of the utmost importance.

Counterproductive

Giving up tobacco is daunting for many smokers who have become immune to negative health messages – they know that smoking is bad for them, yet they are at a loss as to how to tackle quitting. Clinical intervention can be more successful if smokers can regard their smoking as preventing them from living a full life, rather than being the potential cause of their inevitable death. In response to this need, and in order to find a way to reach the 28 million smokers within the 25-34 year old age group across Europe – the "Ex-Smokers Are Unstoppable" campaign was developed to provide smokers with positive motivation to quit smoking for good.



Ex-Smokers Are Unstoppable

'Ex-Smokers Are Unstoppable' (www.exsmokers.eu) is the European Commission's pan-European smoking cessation campaign launched across the 27 EU member states in 2011. The campaign shifts the focus of smoking cessation from avoiding illness to the positive benefits of a smoke-free life: the ability to play sport and feel healthy, have more confidence and money, and hassle-free air travel.

The campaign is underpinned by the scientific, evidence-based tool 'iCoach' – a free and clinically proven digital health coaching platform. To date, iCoach has amassed nearly half a million registered users across the EU. Available in 23 EU languages, it sets off a process of behavioural change in a mobile environment based on pioneering research, practical clinical experience, and the expertise of psychologists and communication experts.

Once registered on iCoach, smokers progress through five stages of smoking cessation, beginning with stage one when there is no intention to immediately quit; stage five is when they are ex-smokers. Smokers are encouraged to record their feelings and smoking 'triggers' through the stages; iCoach becomes their virtual

personalised coach – anticipating each stage with tailored tips and advice. iCoach is accessible via the campaign's website, Facebook page and mobile app.

Approximately 5,000 people in Ireland are registered on iCoach with a self-reported quit rate of 40.1% after three months, compared to the average European self-reported quit rate of 36.8%.

Efforts to support smokers

Breda Flood, the president of the European Federation of Allergy and Airways Disease Patients Associations (EFA) says that 'Ex-Smokers Are Unstoppable' adopts "a unique approach to smoking cessation, delivering real motivation and change for smokers based on an evidence-based digital coaching platform. The need for combined patient education, direct support from healthcare professionals and national and regional legislative efforts is key to reducing the preventable deaths from smoking".

Ireland will become the second country in the world after Australia to introduce plain cigarette packaging. Government regulation, national awareness campaigns and clinical advice provides a strong indication that Ireland is on its way to putting a stop to tobacco-related deaths. This is good news for Irish smokers who wish to quit but do not know where to start.

Nurses

Nurses are professionally equipped and perfectly situated in healthcare settings to help support smokers to stop smoking by directing them to an approach that enables quitting on their own terms, in an environment where they can feel supported.

For more information, see www.exsmokers.eu/ie-en or www.facebook.com/Unstoppable.Ireland or download the app.