

2025 STRENGTH Community of Practice Evaluation Results Summary

The 2025 Supporting Tobacco-Free Recovery for Next Generation Thriving Heroes (STRENGTH) Community of Practice (CoP) was a collaborative effort co-led by the National Behavioral Health Network for Tobacco and Cancer Control (NBHN) and the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors (NACDD) Disability Network for Tobacco Control and Cancer Prevention. Faculty for the CoP included the NBHN and Disability Network teams; partners from the University of Alabama at Birmingham; the University of California San Francisco's Smoking Cessation Leadership Center (SCLC); the University of Colorado's Behavioral Health and Wellness Program (BHWP); Lakeshore Foundation; National Center on Health, Physical Activity, and Disabilities (NCHPAD); Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs; and the Michigan Public Health Institute (MPHI). To best demonstrate the CoP's overall impact in assisting states to initiate and/or enhance practice changes that address commercial tobacco-related imbalances impacting veterans with disabilities, a mixed methods evaluation was conducted by MPHI and NACDD using multiple data sources. This report presents the major findings of the CoP evaluation.

About the CoP

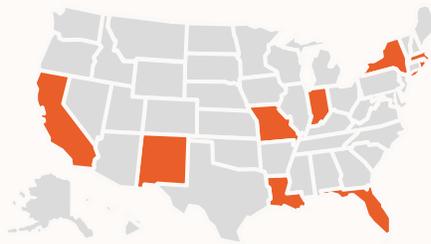
6 months

April – September
2025

9 states

engaged
in the CoP

States Participating in the CoP



CoP states included:

California, Florida, Indiana, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Mexico, New York, Rhode Island

Goal: Initiate and/or enhance practice changes related to addressing commercial tobacco-related imbalances impacting veterans with disabilities.

Timeline

Project Activities



Data Sources Used for Evaluation

The timeline of evaluation data collection activities which included the pre-CoP survey (20 participants), documentation review, Post-CoP survey (12 participants), and Wrap-Up interviews (7 of 9 teams participated), were aligned with the CoP activities. To build knowledge and skills to initiate and/or implement practice changes related to improving health outcomes for veterans with disabilities, CoP state teams were provided with tailored TTA including:



A 2-day virtual training and action planning meeting



TA in developing an action plan to initiate and/or enhance health systems change to increase access to and quality of care for CoP target population



A weekly e-digest and file-sharing website (resource hub) with updates, resources, and events



Monthly peer engagement webinars



Veteran and disability content webinars



Individual monthly coaching calls with national experts



A 1.5-day virtual wrap-up meeting with activities and action plan report-outs

Outcomes & Impact

State teams shared expected and unexpected outcomes and key learnings they believe will support long-term positive impact. Key themes that emerged as outcomes of this CoP included:

Increased capacity to access and implement veteran and disability specific resources, including how to include universal design principles, adapt training and materials, and distributing resource toolkits related to cessation programs and behavioral health supports.

Increased knowledge, awareness, and commitment to the prioritization of veterans with disabilities and the implementation of trauma-informed policy, systems, and environmental change strategies across veteran-serving organizations.

Strengthened partnerships with veteran-serving organizations, public health departments, behavioral health centers, and other local agencies.

6 State teams increased capacity in utilizing veteran and disability specific resources.

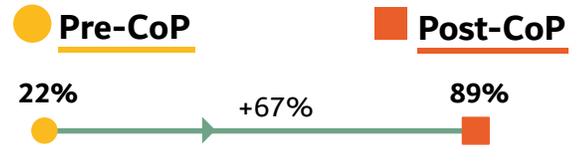
“I think it’s very important when you have a specific population to talk to them and reach out to them, approach them in a way that they feel comfortable. It gave me a way to approach the organization we have in the area and make a better connection because if I go to a meeting with them and they feel like I’m educated...they feel more comfortable talking to me because I took the time to learn their culture and how they work.” – CoP Team

6 State teams reported the CoP contributed to strengthening existing partnerships and leveraging new partnerships.

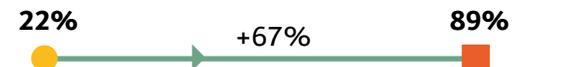
The chart below shows the **top five** overall increases in knowledge, skills and awareness self-ratings after participating in the CoP and the percentage point increase between pre-CoP and post-CoP time points. When comparing self-ratings, state teams demonstrated gains in knowledge, skills and awareness questions.

Top 5 Knowledge, Skill, or Awareness Changes

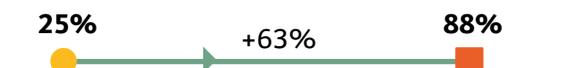
I can identify specific policy opportunities to integrate systems change initiatives that foster high quality, non-exclusionary and trauma-informed care across the health care system for veterans with disabilities.



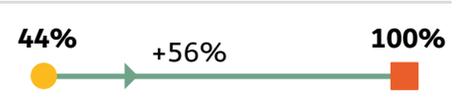
I could identify sources of data to inform practice and policy change initiatives.



I understand specific care models, evidence-based practices and approaches that can be used for veterans with disabilities to address health inequities.



I understood the concepts of social and political factors influencing health and how they lead to negative health outcomes and disparities for veterans with disabilities and/or behavioral health considerations.



I understood the impact of medical and scientific mistrust on accessing health care for veterans with disabilities and/or behavioral health considerations.



% who strongly agree or agree with the statement



The CoP kind of allowed for an opportunity that was more of like an engaging learning experience and on a specific topic that I felt like I have an opportunity to ask questions...So I felt like the structure and timing of it was really helpful to my learning experience of what the tobacco program does and why we exist and why it all matters. And then that opportunity to really home in on a specific population made it that much more memorable for me.” -CoP Team

What Participants Said...

“

The partnerships we've built and being able to educate our community that is not aware of what the military life is—I think that is the most significant part of the project.”

– CoP Team

“

Through this work, I've learned valuable skills for understanding veteran culture and communicating with respect. These lessons have helped me not only in my professional role, but also in how I support my family.”

– CoP Team

“

The one thing I want to reiterate is how grateful I am that everyone who's been leading the CoP has been so clear that after this ends, we're still here to help you, especially with where we are in our timeline of this toolkit...and it's been really encouraging from the STRENGTH CoP team to know that we can still reach out to them for assistance.”

– CoP Team

“

It wasn't on the forefront of our mind at all, like that they [veterans, people with disabilities] might need our attention or like the depth of disability access... We've done a lot to change things since then to make it more accessible.”

– CoP Team

Key Findings & Recommendations

Among the various components of the CoP, state teams found the following activities to be **most helpful**:



Access to faculty experts and tailored knowledge & resources

Many teams shared that access to experts in the field of tobacco cessation and behavioral health, and information from individuals with lived experience as a veteran and/or individuals with disabilities was one of the most impactful aspects of the CoP experience; a few teams shared how they appreciated having the resource hub and shared documents to assist them in adapting their own materials without having to 'reinvent the wheel'.



Creating accountability and momentum towards their goals through coaching calls

One-on-one monthly coaching calls with faculty were valuable to teams for staying accountable to their goals and receiving timely feedback. The creation and monthly updating of action plans, supported by CoP faculty, helped teams achieve a shared vision, improve efficiency, communicate efforts with partners and adjusted their goals to be more feasible. Additionally, sharing experiences with other states provided reassurance and confirmed a shared vision.



Connecting with peers at monthly engagement calls & virtual wrap-up

State teams found it extremely valuable to connect with peers from other states, share ideas, and learn from each other's successes and challenges; one team shared “*the peer engagement calls and breakout groups helped us to realize we're not alone and gave us new strategies to try*”.

For future consideration, state teams suggested **strategies to enhance the experience and promote future impact**, including:



Provide more support around data collection that will help teams measure achievements and align with CoP outcomes



Maximize meeting structure and content for increased engagement



Provide additional guidance on how to integrate veteran and disability population



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