

Center of Excellence for Tobacco Free Recovery

Tobacco-Free Recovery Learning Community Charter

Reducing rates of tobacco use among people with mental health and/or substance use conditions

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has awarded Cicatelli Associates Inc. (CAI) funding to administer the National Center of Excellence for Tobacco-Free Recovery (CoE-TFR) from September 2023 through August 2028. The CoE-TFR partners with States, Territories, and Tribal nations to reduce commercial tobacco and nicotine use among people with mental health and substance use conditions by increasing access to evidence-based tobacco use treatment and behavioral supports. States play a critical role in resourcing and shaping how evidence-based tobacco-use treatment and support is provided through policy, financing, workforce development, and behavioral health systems change. This initiative brings state leaders together to strengthen partnerships, across divisions and departments and with community to develop statewide strategies that expand access to evidence-based tobacco use treatment and behavioral supports.

THE ISSUE – People with Behavioral Health Conditions Lack Access to Evidence Based Tobacco Use Treatment

People with behavioral health conditions represent 25% of the U.S. adult population but account for nearly 40% of all cigarettes sold. Half of all deaths among people who received behavioral health services were tobacco-related, contributing to disproportionately high rates of chronic disease, cancer, and premature death.

While states have made important progress over the past decade, tobacco and nicotine use is concentrated among certain populations – including people with behavioral health organizations. Many behavioral health organizations are taking the important first step by asking people about tobacco use; However, too many stop there. While most behavioral health facilities screen for tobacco use, counseling is not yet available in all settings and fewer than half provide nicotine replacement therapy or other FDA-approved medications, despite strong evidence that combining counseling, medication, and recovery support gives people the best chance of success.

Working in partnership with state, territory and native nation health authorities to close this treatment gap represents one of the greatest opportunities to improve mental health and substance use outcomes, strengthen behavioral health systems, improve the health and lives of people with behavioral health conditions and reduce healthcare costs.

THE OPPORTUNITY – State Leaders Navigating and Sustaining Impact - Peer to Peer Learning and Action

The public health landscape is shifting at the federal and state-level. These shifts bring challenges and new opportunities to leverage existing resources and work together in new ways to ensure the public's health. A renewed national focus on chronic disease prevention,

expanded flexibility through Medicaid, and the ability to braid and blend funding across behavioral health, public health, Medicaid, settlement funds, and other state and local resources provide new pathways to strengthen and sustain tobacco use treatment services.

State Health Authorities can't do this work alone. Success depends on learning from one another, building strong cross-department and cross-sector partnerships, engaging providers and people with lived experience, to translate evidence into action.

The Tobacco-Free Recovery Learning Community was created for this moment. The Learning Community experience will serve as a catalyst to support five state/territory/native nation health authority teams in mobilizing internal and external partners, and people with lived experience, to develop and implement a statewide action plan to increase access to tobacco use treatment and behavioral supports with the goal of reducing the rates of commercial tobacco use among persons with behavioral health conditions.

Tobacco-Free Recovery Learning Community Structure and Components

The Tobacco-Free Recovery Learning Community is an 18-month initiative that moves participating state health authority teams through three phases described below.

1. Tobacco-Free Recovery Learning Community

Five state/territory/native nation health authority teams will participate in an 18-month Learning Community meeting through a combination of **in-person** and **virtual** convenings. The Learning Community is the ongoing peer cohort infrastructure that runs throughout the initiative, it is the vehicle through which teams build the knowledge, relationships, and capacity needed to design their own Leadership Academy and implement their Tobacco-Free Recovery Action Plan. Through the Learning Community, participating teams will:

Focus area	What teams do
Peer learning and leadership	Learn from peer states and national experts; share successes and challenges across the cohort
Cross-agency partnership	Establish and strengthen cross-department, cross-division, and cross-agency partnerships to identify existing resources for greater impact
Stakeholder engagement	Strengthen partnerships with health and supportive service providers, including people with lived experience and their families, to inform tobacco-free recovery planning
Data and information use	Build capacity to use data and information to monitor progress and inform continuous improvement
Leadership Academy readiness	Use Learning Community experience to design and prepare to facilitate a state-level Tobacco-Free Recovery Leadership Academy

2. Tobacco-Free Recovery Leadership Academy

Building on their Learning Community experience, each participating team will design and facilitate its own 1.5-day Tobacco-Free Recovery Leadership Academy within the first 12 months of the initiative. Teams will receive pro-active technical assistance (TA) from the CoE-TFR team and subject matter experts throughout the initiative: monthly TA sessions (30-60 minutes each) during the Learning Community phase, increasing to about weekly TA sessions during Leadership Academy planning. This is a state-level convening, distinct from the cross-state Learning Community, that brings together a broad set of in-state stakeholders to co-create a Tobacco-Free Recovery Action Plan. All participating teams will also engage in an on-site planning session with the CoE-TFR team to prepare for the Leadership Academy.

Day	Focus and participants
Day 1 (full day)	All partners: people with lived experience, providers, payers, public health administrators across divisions and departments, and other identified stakeholders. The full group works together to develop the draft Tobacco-Free Recovery Action Plan using an inclusive planning process.
Day 2 (half day)	Partners who self-identify to contribute to finalizing the Action Plan. This smaller group refines plan priorities, identifies performance measures, and establishes systems for implementation.

3. Tobacco-Free Recovery Action Plan Implementation

Following the Leadership Academy, each participating team transitions from planning to implementation. CoE-TFR provides ongoing technical assistance throughout this phase. Teams meet regularly for the first six months after the Academy, then quarterly to review progress, address challenges, and refine implementation strategies.

Implementation focus	Key activities
Create and Maintain Execution Structure	Establish accountability structures to clarify implementation timelines, roles, responsibilities and milestones
Execute priority strategies	Implement the priority strategies identified in the Tobacco-Free Recovery Action Plan
Monitor progress	Track performance measures and outcomes; use data to inform continuous quality improvement
Document and learn	Capture successes, challenges, and lessons learned to inform ongoing refinement of the Action Plan

How Will We Measure Our Success?

To measure our success, we will work together to determine the extent to which each participating state, territory, native nation team:

- Convened their Tobacco-Free Recovery Leadership Academy within 12 months of acceptance into the learning community

- Engaged partners in the Leadership Academy convening, action planning, and follow-up activities
- Established a Tobacco-Free Recovery Action Plan
- Established and implemented structures and processes to execute their tobacco-free recovery action plan
- Implemented systems to measure and monitor progress in implementation of plan and outcomes associated with reducing rates of tobacco use
- Demonstrated reductions in use of commercial tobacco products by people with behavioral health conditions over 5-10 years using [The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System](#) (BRFSS) and [National Substance Use and Mental Health Services Survey](#) (N-SUMHSS) data

Funding Considerations for Participation

All costs associated with participation in learning community will be funded by the CoE-TFR. In addition, we will cover costs associated with state/territory/native nation health authority teams convening their own Tobacco-Free Recovery Leadership Academy, with the exception of food and beverages for the convening.

REQUIREMENTS – For Participation in Tobacco-Free Recovery Learning Community

Participation is a selective process and includes submission of a brief application and interview. Before applying, consider the requirements described below.

1. Eligibility

- Anchor organizations must be a State Department, Office or Program of Tobacco Control, Chronic Disease, Mental Health, Substance Use/Addiction Services or Behavioral Health
- *Please note:* Representatives from State Departments, Offices, or Programs that oversee or support your state network of SAMHSA funded behavioral health programs, including recovery support, mental health, substance use disorder/addiction services, and Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs) **MUST** be part of your Leadership Academy Team.

2. Application Process

- Complete a Tobacco-Free Recovery Learning Community Application (15-20 mins)
- Participate in a 20-minute interview following submission

3. Establish Tobacco-Free Recovery Leadership Academy Team

- Identify and convene a multidisciplinary team of 4 to 6 individuals to participate in all Learning Community and Leadership Academy activities, with organizational sponsorship from an individual with authority to support the team's participation.
- Each team will be unique to your state. **We suggest representative(s) from:**
 - State Offices of Behavioral and Mental Health, Substance Use Programs
 - State Tobacco Control Programs
 - State Medicaid Offices or Offices that oversee state health insurance plans
 - State Health Department Office of Quality Management
 - Surveillance, Epidemiology, Research or Evaluation

- Behavioral Health System representative
- State funded training programs
- Organizations that represent people with lived experience (e.g. Peer Run Organizations, Recovery Community Centers, Recovery Housing, NAMI)

4. Participation commitments (see table 1 for timeline)

- Complete a comprehensive landscape analysis before the opening session.
- Attend two 2-day in-person Learning Community sessions in NYC (opening and closing) and three 2-hour virtual sessions.
- Participate in proactive TA sessions with the CoE-TFR team and subject matter experts (30-60 min each): monthly during the Learning Community, shifting to about weekly during Leadership Academy planning, including one on-site planning session
- Submit an implementation survey at up to 4 points across the 18 months.
- Convene a 1.5-day in-person Tobacco-Free Recovery Leadership Academy and develop your state/territory/native nation-specific Action Plan.
- Develop and implement the structures, systems, governance, and accountability mechanisms needed to execute the Tobacco-Free Recovery Action Plan.
- Serve as the long-term anchor team: convene partners, implement the Action Plan, monitor progress with readily available data, and sustain action beyond the Learning Community.

BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION

- **A peer network built for this exact moment** — state, territory, and native nation leaders navigating the same shifting landscape, with regular space to pressure-test strategies, troubleshoot in real time, and see how other states are turning constraint into action.
- **Free, individualized technical assistance** from experts in tobacco and behavioral health policy, systems change, and social norms change — help you don't have to find, fund, or build in-house, at a time when every internal resource is already stretched.
- **A head start on braiding and blending funding** across behavioral health, public health, Medicaid, settlement funds, and other state and local resources — turning new flexibility into a concrete, fundable Action Plan before other states catch up.
- **Stronger cross-sector partnerships and implementation structures** that outlast this cohort — so tobacco-free recovery efforts keep moving even as budgets, staff, and priorities shift.
- **Strategies built with the people most affected** — meaningful inclusion of people, families, and communities with behavioral health conditions who use tobacco and nicotine products, so your Action Plan reflects real need, not guesswork.
- **A measurable reduction in the economic burden of tobacco** — on people, families, communities, and your state's health care system, at a time when every dollar saved matters more than ever.

- **CoE-TFR funding to showcase your results** at local and national conferences, positioning your state as a leader other states look to.
- **A pathway to additional funding:** eligible organizations identified through the action planning process may apply for CoE-TFR Action Plan Implementation Mini-Grants — turning your strategy into resourced, sustained implementation (subject to funding availability).

TIMELINE OF KEY ACTIVITIES – Cohort 3

Over 18 months, state/territory/native nation teams will work together as a peer cohort — and independently within their own states — to plan and implement Tobacco-Free Recovery Action Plans that reduce tobacco use among people with behavioral health conditions. Key activities and timelines associated with participation in the TFR Learning Community are described below.

Table 1. Tobacco-Free Recovery Learning Community Timeline of Key Activities

Activity	Month	Time
Dissemination of Learning Community Application	July 16 th , 2026	12pm ET
CoE-TFR Learning Community Overview and Application Process Webinar	July 30 th , 2026	1pm ET
Applications Due	August 25 th , 2026	5pm ET
Review of applications including 30-minute interviews	Late August- Mid Sept	
Selection of states/territories/native nations announced	September 30 th , 2026	
Learning Community Kick-off Orientation Webinar	October 14 th , 2026	4pm ET
Completion of Landscape Analysis	October 14 th – December 16 th 2026	Submission Deadline: 12/16 at 5pm ET
Learning Community In-Person Opening Session	January 27-28 th , 2027	8:30am-4:30pm both days in NYC
Learning Community Virtual Session 1	March 17 th 2027	2:00-4:00pm ET
TA to plan Leadership Academy	November 2026 - September 2027	Monthly huddles, increasing to weekly
TA (on-site) Leadership Academy planning session	February 2027-April 2027	TBD

States Convene State/Territory/Native Nation-Specific TFR Leadership Academies	May 2027-September 2027	TBD
Learning Community Virtual Session 2	June 17, 2027	2:00-4:00 pm ET
Learning Community Virtual Session 3	September 15 th , 2027	2:00-4:00 pm ET
Learning Community In-Person Closing Session	January 27-28 th , 2028	8:30am-4:30pm both days in NYC
TA toward implementation of TFR Action Plan	July 2027-January 2028	TBD
Tobacco-Free Recovery Summative Congress (All Cohorts - 12 states/territories/native nations)	Summer 2028	TBD

Who to Contact:

If you have any questions about this charter, the TFR Learning Community application or your eligibility to participate, please contact CoE-TFR Project Director, David Davis, at ddavis@caiglobal.org and Project Manager, Nicole Filion, at nfilion@caiglobal.org