

Stop-smoking services under threat as budgets are cut

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Credit: Vera Kratochvil/public domain

Stop smoking services across England are facing ongoing budget cuts after six in ten local authorities (59 per cent) were forced to reduce their funding in the last year according to a new joint report by ASH and Cancer Research UK published today (Wednesday).

Local authorities became responsible for Stop Smoking Services and

[tobacco control](#) in 2013. These services were previously delivered by the NHS.

Cuts to the Public Health Grant from HM Treasury - which local authorities rely on to fund these services - are putting enormous pressure on councils.

Cancer Research UK is calling on the public and local councillors to help protect crucial Stop Smoking Services and mass media quit smoking campaigns by urging Westminster to solve the [public health](#) funding crisis.

The number of local authorities cutting funding has risen from around four in ten (39 per cent) local services in 2015/16.

Almost half (48 per cent) of budgets for Stop Smoking Services have been cut by more than five per cent. In addition, 45 per cent of local authorities have cut their budgets for other tobacco control work such as tackling the illegal tobacco market and preventing the uptake of smoking by young people.

This is the third annual report involving 129 local authorities across England.

Around one in six (16.9 per cent) adults in England smoke in 2015. This equates to around 7.5 million adult smokers.

Specialist Stop Smoking Services provided as part of a comprehensive strategy are the most effective way to help smokers successfully break the addiction. Smokers are around three times more likely to [stop smoking](#) if they use these services. But with repeated cuts to public health budgets, the findings suggest financial pressures are now forcing councils to make difficult decisions about how they can support smokers

to stop.

There have been cuts to budgets for Stop Smoking Services and wider tobacco control work in every region in England. Cuts to Stop Smoking Service budgets were most frequent in the East of England, London and the Midlands.

The report reveals strong support for helping smokers to quit among councils in each region, and that staff consider tobacco control an above average priority in the majority (55 per cent) of local authorities.

Despite there being little opposition to tobacco control among key stakeholders in local authorities, the amount of staff time dedicated to tobacco control has fallen in more than four in ten (43 per cent) local authorities.

In one in five local authorities (20 per cent) the specialist stop smoking service has been entirely replaced by a broader lifestyle advice service. Without trained specialist advisers, there is limited evidence that these types of services are effective for smoking cessation.

Alison Cox, Cancer Research UK's director of cancer prevention, said: "Smaller budgets aren't just numbers on a balance-sheet - they can have devastating impacts on people's lives. Continued public health cuts are forcing the majority of local authorities in England to cut funding for life-saving stop smoking services and enforcement of anti-smoking laws. Helping smokers to quit will also save a hard-pressed NHS money by reducing the burden of preventable diseases. Tobacco is the single biggest preventable cause of cancer, and we urge the Government to do all it can to reduce the wholly avoidable burden of smoking-related diseases.

"We have a vision for the future - a tobacco-free UK where, by 2035,

fewer than one in 20 adults smoke. If we are to realise this ambition, then it's vital to help smokers quit by ensuring that the most effective route - through specialist stop smoking support - receives continued investment."

Deborah Arnott, Chief Executive of ASH said: "Our research shows that most local authorities remain committed to reducing smoking but key services are under threat from ongoing funding cuts. Meanwhile, the tobacco industry continues to reap huge profits from a product that kills around 100,000 people every year in the UK and is responsible for half the difference in life expectancy between the rich and the poor.

"If the Prime Minister is to succeed in her ambition to improve the life chances of the poorest in society the government must take action to ensure that [local authorities](#) have the tools and the funding they need to continue to provide specialist stop smoking services as part of a tobacco control strategy targeted at those with greatest need."

More information: [www.cancerresearchuk.org/sites ...
cruk_finalfinal.pdf](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/sites/cruk_finalfinal.pdf)

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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