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VA's 'Better Starts Today' campaign challenges Veterans to ditch smokeless tobacco

WASHINGTON — Today the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that it will mark the annual [Great American Spit Out](#) on Feb. 21, calling attention to the dangers of using smokeless tobacco, with its "Better Starts Today" campaign.

The VA campaign encourages Veterans who use tobacco products, including smokeless tobacco, to stop dipping or chewing for at least one day, and take advantage of innovative VA tools to help them succeed, with the hope that they may choose to quit permanently.

"Quitting smokeless tobacco can be challenging, but with VA's help it can be much easier," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "That's why we are telling Veterans about several proven strategies and tools that can help them give up smokeless tobacco for good."

Resources to help Veterans quit smokeless tobacco include:

- **Quit VET**, a toll-free national Quitline, at 855-QUIT-VET (855-784-8838) for Veterans to speak with a tobacco cessation counselor, make a quit plan and receive ongoing counseling after their quit date. Quitline counselors are available from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. (EST) Monday through Friday.
- **SmokefreeVET**, a text message program (text VET to 47848) offering Veterans three to five support texts a day with advice and encouragement to help them while they stop using tobacco. Veterans can also text the keywords URGE, STRESS and DIPPED anytime to receive an immediate tip for coping with an urge to use, a slip or stress.

A 2015 Centers for Disease Control survey estimated 29.2 percent of American Veterans use at least one tobacco product, with 5.2 percent using smokeless tobacco. Smokeless tobacco is associated with mouth and esophageal cancer, heart disease, stroke, tooth decay and receding gums.

VA providers offer individual counseling, group classes, phone and telehealth clinics and FDA-approved medications.

For more information and resources about tobacco cessation and how families and friends of Veterans can help, visit www.mentalhealth.va.gov/quit-tobacco.

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