

Kara Backer, MBA, RRT, NCTTP

Kara Backer, MBA, RRT, NCTTP, has been the Nicotine Dependence Treatment Coordinator in the Tobacco Prevention and Control Program (TPCP) at the North Dakota Health and Human Services since 2014. Ms. Backer coordinates a state-funded NDQuits Cessation (NDQC) Grant Program, supporting the implementation and expansion of tobacco and nicotine dependence treatment in health systems and various organizations to improve the health of North Dakotans. Her background includes 15 years as a bedside respiratory therapist, which provides a helpful perspective on healthcare staff workload and documentation with different electronic health records (EHR).

While in this role, Ms. Backer has guided many grant successes. She assists health systems in enhancing EHR documentation to streamline tobacco and nicotine dependence treatment interventions and extract treatment data to track outcomes for the health system and the TPCP. In 2017, two extensive health systems implemented the e-Referral, resulting in a 400% increase in quitline referrals. Currently, all major health systems in North Dakota have a functioning e-Referral. In 2018, she began organizing in-state tobacco treatment specialist (TTS) trainings to increase local cessation resources. Three hundred TTS have been trained in North Dakota since then, with many recent TTS attendees working in behavioral health organizations. Training staff in behavioral health settings helps the TPCP expand tobacco and nicotine dependence treatment in a population with high tobacco use prevalence. In 2021, Ms. Backer created a specialized program for TTS in the NDQC Grant Program. The Maternal Tobacco Program contains specific content and materials for pregnant women using commercial tobacco products, and the program continues to support these women postpartum. The NDQC Grant Program has grown from four to 21 grantees, and Ms. Backer monitors and audits the contracts promoting transparency and fiscal responsibility. Lastly, to keep TTS engaged and maintain current education, Ms. Backer facilitates the TPCP and NDQC grantees in planning in-state tobacco treatment conferences.