

Care-A-Van aims to curb smoking

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The Comox Valley mobile medical clinic known as the Care-A-Van is aiming to help homeless people or those at risk of homelessness to quit smoking.

Launched on July 4, the initiative is aimed at connecting the Care-A-Van's clients to free smoking cessation treatments already offered by the province.

Doctors, nurses and pharmacists volunteering aboard the Care-A-Van will sign eligible persons up for approved nicotine replacement therapies like the patch and the gum, and will also provide weekly motivational counselling sessions to help people steer clear of the cigarettes.

Care-A-Van coordinator Helen Boyd said that as far as she is aware, this is the first time a non-profit care provider has offered this particular service in the country.

The mobile clinic and its non-profit parent organization Comox Bay Care Society also offer basic healthcare and access to dental and optometry services.

Boyd, a nurse who has worked with homeless people for years, said roughly 70 per cent of people on the street smoke. That has consequences not just for the health of the individual, but also costs to the healthcare system.

"- It's extremely costly for anybody who develops lung disease or heart disease," she said.

"Because they end up in a hospital just like you and I would, and so it's absolutely worth tackling, because you're going to have the development of a chronic illness that's going to cost the healthcare system tons of money in the end."

She added that many homeless people in the Valley may not realize that the free service is available to them, and said the "innovative" approach offered by the Care-A-Van ensures that they can access it.

"There's lots of smoking cessation programs, but not many people have done it with the homeless population," she said.

It may take several attempts, but those who are successful at kicking their nicotine addiction will also save "easily \$50 a week," she added.

According to the Canadian Heart and Stroke Foundation, 37,000 deaths a year in Canada are smoking related.

If current rates of tobacco use continue, approximately one million Canadians will die over the next 20 years from smoking and second-hand smoke, the foundation says.