

Social media helps young adults quit smoking

WATERLOO, Ont. (Tuesday, June 9, 2015) – Young adults who use social media to quit smoking are twice as successful in their efforts as those who use a more traditional method, according to new research from the University of Waterloo.

The study, published last week in [Nicotine & Tobacco Research](#), compared the success of the social media-based campaign [Break It Off](#) with Smokers' Helpline, a telephone hotline for young adults looking to quit smoking.

After three months in the program, 32 per cent of smokers who used Break It Off apps and web tools had quit smoking, compared to 14 per cent of their peers who used the telephone-based support.

"These findings suggest that the creators of public health campaigns need to evaluate how they use social media channels and social networks to improve health, especially with regards to younger demographics," said Bruce Baskerville, a senior scientist at the Propel Centre for Population Health Impact at Waterloo, who led the study.

In Canada, young adults aged 19 to 29 have the highest rate of smoking, but they report low use of traditional cessation services, such as helplines. Young adults make up the largest demographic of social media users, with 91 per cent using Facebook and one third actively engaged in microblogging sites such as Twitter.

"Traditional cessation services can have limited reach and this reduced visibility lessens their impact in a digital era," said Baskerville. "Because they are such heavy users of social media, these platforms provide an alternative and successful way of reaching smokers who are less likely to relate to other cessation programs."

The Canadian Cancer Society launched Break It Off in January 2012 to engage young adults in smoking cessation through an interactive website and social media. The campaign, which compares quitting smoking with ending a romantic relationship, provides users with an interactive website and smartphone app to encourage smoking cessation.

Health Canada has extended funding for Break It Off for another five years as a result of the campaign's success reaching young adults.

About the University of Waterloo

In just half a century, the University of Waterloo, located at the heart of Canada's technology hub, has become one of Canada's leading comprehensive universities with 35,000 full- and part-time students in undergraduate and graduate programs. A globally focused institution, celebrated as Canada's most innovative university for 23 consecutive years, Waterloo is home to the world's largest post-secondary co-operative education program and encourages enterprising partnerships in learning, research and discovery. In the next decade, the university is committed to building a better future for Canada and the world by championing innovation and collaboration to create solutions relevant to the needs of today and tomorrow. For more information about Waterloo, please visit uwaterloo.ca.