Benefits of Incentives for Breastfeeding and Smoking cessation in pregnancy (BIBS): a mixed-methods study to inform trial design

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Plain English summary

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We reviewed the evidence on incentives to help women stop smoking in pregnancy or to breastfeed. We interviewed 88 women/partners, 53 health professionals, 24 experts/service managers and 63 conference attendees to discuss how incentives might work and features of incentive services. We surveyed 1144 members of the general public, 497 health professionals and 320 women who smoke or who smoked.

Voucher incentives of > £20.00 per month, with regular check-ups to prove that smoking has stopped, increase the likelihood that women will stop smoking in pregnancy. Opinion on the acceptability of incentives was mixed. Agreement was more likely in adults aged ≤ 44 years and ethnic minorities (for breastfeeding). Disagreement was more likely among women and the less educated. Incentives for all, regardless of income, were preferred. Of seven potential incentives, a free breast pump worth £40.00 was most acceptable. People supported giving shopping vouchers for stopping smoking in pregnancy more than giving shopping vouchers for (1) stopping smoking after birth, (2) a smoke-free home or (3) breastfeeding. Additional funding for local health services who meet targets had similar support, but doctors disagreed. Concerns included cheating, stigma and wasting money.

Personal difficulties, emotions, socialising and attitudes of family and friends are all challenges in stopping smoking and breastfeeding. An incentive service might address these challenges by including regular telephone, text or face-to-face support; setting goals; including check-ups; providing a buddy; and providing non-judgemental, continuous care from someone with expertise.

Research is needed into whether incentives work on their own and/or with support and the costs compared with the benefits.
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