The Alberta Cancer Board initiated a Cancer Prevention Program as a demonstration project in early 1987. One component of that project was a Community Cancer Prevention Program implemented in Medicine Hat and Lethbridge. Tobacco was identified as one priority for the program. A smoking cessation contest "Quit to Win" was chosen as a strategy to reduce tobacco use by the Advisory Committee in Medicine Hat. This article reports on the one year follow-up of the 1990 Medicine Hat Contest to determine quit rates, describe the characteristics of successful quitters and evaluate the contest.

The contest, with a major prize as incentive, was for adult smokers 18 year of age and over. The media campaign for "Quit to Win" which began during national Non-smoking Week, included radio and newspaper ads as well as poster displays. The promotional brochure which contained the contest rules and an entry form was available at a variety of locations throughout the city. Entry forms were also printed in the local newspaper.

To be eligible for prizes, contestants had to be smoke-free for six weeks and have their smoking status verified by a "Buddy". All contestants were contacted by telephone at the end of the contest and again six months and one year later. The contest attracted seventy-five individuals representing a variety of ages, educational levels and smoking habits. The majority were between 25 - 44 years of age, smoked a pack a day or more, and had smoked more than 10 years. At the end of the six week contest, 42 individuals reported quitting smoking. At six months, 20 reported continuous abstinence and at one year 16 were still abstainers. Quit rates were calculated using a worst-case scenario that assumed contestants lost to follow-up were current smokers. The quit rates of 27% at six months and 21% at one year compare very favourably with other smoking cessation interventions. The public health impact of a community-wide contest is probably greater than the quit rates indicate as increased awareness of tobacco and health occurs in a broad segment of a population.

Contestants age 45 years and older, those who had smoked more than 20 years and who did not live with a smoker were the most successful quitters. Older long term smokers have traditionally been viewed as less motivated to quit smoking. The evaluation of this contest showed that a contest was an effective way to reach this group of smokers in Medicine Hat.

A smoking cessation contest reaches smokers of a variety of ages, education and smoking habits with a relatively simple intervention. This study demonstrated that a contest can be planned, delivered and evaluated in a community setting. "Quit to Win" contests have subsequently been held in Medicine Hat and Lethbridge.