

Getting Started on Smokefree Multi-Family Housing

Residents living in multi-family residential buildings like apartments and condominiums are frequently exposed to secondhand smoke drifting into their home from other parts of the building. Efforts are underway around the country to support expanding smokefree housing options so that residents in multi-family buildings can have a cleaner, safer, smokefree living environment.

Health groups and advocates can learn more in this document about how to get started on smokefree multi-family housing efforts in their communities.

Form a coalition or working group of smokefree housing stakeholders.

- Who is interested in smokefree living environments in your community?

<input type="radio"/> Residents	<input type="radio"/> Public housing authorities
<input type="radio"/> Landlords	<input type="radio"/> Affordable housing providers
<input type="radio"/> Property management companies	<input type="radio"/> Fair housing councils
<input type="radio"/> Tobacco control & cessation	<input type="radio"/> Homeowners associations (HOAs)
<input type="radio"/> Asthma programs	<input type="radio"/> Landlord/Apartment associations
<input type="radio"/> Healthy Housing organizations	<input type="radio"/> Housing industry trade groups
<input type="radio"/> Housing developers	<input type="radio"/> Housing industry publications
<input type="radio"/> Green building associations	<input type="radio"/> Community health workers
<input type="radio"/> Faith communities	<input type="radio"/> City/county housing department
<input type="radio"/> Community development corporation	<input type="radio"/> Nutrition & physical activity initiatives

- A smokefree building is in the best interest of residents because it protects their health and well-being.
- A smokefree building is in the best interest of housing providers because it is good for their bottom line by reducing costs and risks, and provides a marketable amenity.
- Smokefree housing is a social justice issue and can reduce health disparities, which is a reason for affordable housing providers, in particular, to implement smokefree policies.
- People are interested in smokefree housing from different perspectives, so think broadly about who in the community may be interested in getting engaged.

Learn your housing stock and building ownership/management:

- Multi-unit housing comes in all sizes and types of buildings. Apartments, condominiums, and townhomes are common types of multi-family housing, and the buildings can take any formation that shares walls or ceilings: high-rise towers, row houses, lofts, etc.

Who are multi-unit housing providers?

- In general, multi-unit housing can be divided into market-rate and affordable providers.
- **Market-rate multi-unit housing** is privately owned and does not receive government subsidies.
 - Market-rate housing may be either renter-occupied or owner-occupied (condominiums and other common-interest communities).
- **Affordable housing** takes several forms and is available to for low-income families, the elderly, and the disabled.
 - Public housing authorities are public agencies that own and manage buildings, and receive federal subsidies.

- Housing Choice Voucher programs provide federal subsidies to public housing authorities, which administers vouchers for families to rent units in privately owned buildings.
- Community development corporations may also own and manage affordable housing.

Who makes the decisions?

- Market-rate housing: landlords, property owners, management companies, homeowners associations, or condominium or co-op board.
- Affordable housing: Public housing authority, property owners, community development corporations, low income housing developers.

What is your goal?

Smokefree multi-family housing is being approached from a number of angles, and you should consider which option(s) may be best to undertake in your community.

- Many communities are working with individual market-rate and affordable housing providers to adopt smokefree policies for the buildings they own and/or manage.
- Other communities are focusing on affordable housing by working with Public Housing Authorities to adopt a policy for the buildings they own and/or manage.
- A smaller but growing number of communities are enacting ordinances at the city or county level to require smokefree multi-unit housing community-wide. If an ordinance is the goal, the outreach recommended below is an integral part of building community support before seeking legislation.

There are **additional approaches** being considered to support an increased demand for smokefree housing options:

- **Disclosure:** A disclosure provision requires that housing providers disclose to prospective residents if smoking is permitted in or on the property, and if so, where. Requiring disclosure of smoking status and location allows nonsmokers to make a more informed decision when looking for housing.
- **Nuisance:** Declaring secondhand smoke a nuisance gives nonsmokers a tool to address drifting secondhand smoke by allowing the impacted resident to take steps to abate the nuisance in small claims court. A nuisance provision does not restrict where smoking can occur, but it does provide a means for people to mediate the situation if they are affected by drifting smoke.
- **Low Income Housing Tax Credit:** Tax credits, and other financial incentives, are offered by governments to developers of low-income housing. Developers need a certain number of tax credits in order to get their building project approved. Consider working with your city or state to create a tax credit for making a new or renovated low-income housing building smokefree.

Outreach to housing providers & industry trade organizations:

- **Send housing providers a post card or email** highlighting the benefits of a smokefree building policy. Encourage them to visit your website for information and tools, or to attend an informational meeting. To obtain a list of housing providers, see if they are required to register with a local or state authority. Other sources for provider contact information may be landlord/apartment associations, affordable housing registries, and rental housing websites.
- **Conduct a survey of housing providers** to learn if they have a policy addressing smoking and if so, the areas where it applies, how it is enforced, and if they have any enforcement problems. If they do not have a policy, ask if they have interest in adopting one, what barriers may be to adopting a policy, and any concerns or questions.
- **Pitch a story** about the benefits of a smokefree building to housing industry newsletters, magazines, websites, and blogs.

- **Reach out to industry trade organizations** such as state or local landlord/apartment associations, rental housing developers, and affordable housing associations.
- **Attend housing provider and industry meetings** and listen to their priorities and concerns.
- **Host an informational booth** at a housing industry conference.
- **Request time** to present on the benefits of a smokefree policy at a meeting or conference.
- **Host informational meetings and trainings** for landlords, homeowners associations, public housing authorities, and other providers or trade groups who are interested in learning about smokefree policies.
- **Run educational ads or announce trainings** in housing industry media.
- **Create a webpage.** Easily accessible tools and resources help make adopting and implementing a smokefree policy an easier choice. Provide sample smokefree signs. Advertise upcoming trainings and meetings. Encourage housing providers to promote their smokefree buildings by advertising this much-desired amenity. Offer to promote smokefree buildings by listing them on the webpage.

Use the right messages:

- It is critical to educate housing providers and the housing industry on the benefits of a smokefree building from *their* perspective.
- The financial benefits are much more persuasive than the health benefits.
- Housing providers are motivated to adopt a smokefree policy because it reduces maintenance costs, reduces turnover costs and time, reduces fire risk, and improves marketability.

Smokefree housing pioneers:

- **Cultivate relationships** with landlords, public housing authorities, homeowners associations, and other providers who have already implemented a smokefree policy.
- **Encourage trend leaders to share their experiences** with other providers who are considering a smokefree policy.
- **Peer-to-peer outreach resonates stronger** and has more influence than any advice from a health group.

Outreach to additional community stakeholders:

- **Outreach first to organizations you already know**, such as connections within the health department or other city departments, including asthma programs, cessation services, community health workers, and nutrition/physical activity programs.
- **Outreach next to organizations elsewhere in the community** with whom you may not already have connections, such as Healthy Housing programs, a Community Development Corporation, and faith communities.
- **Set up meetings and attend conferences.** Learn about their priorities, common areas of interest, and how collaborating might be mutually beneficial.
- **Asthma management programs** and other health service outreach programs may have established connections in residential buildings, especially affordable housing.
- **Healthy Housing** organizations and programs work on a broad spectrum of issues, including indoor air quality, asthma triggers, lead, mold, pests, and other conditions that have a negative impact on health and well-being in the home.
- **City or county housing departments** may have valuable input and connections through their work with affordable housing programs, redevelopment programs, home inspections, and code enforcement.

Outreach to residents:

- **Resident surveys.** Help housing providers conduct resident surveys to learn resident's thoughts on the current smoking policy, if they permit smoking in the apartment, if they are exposed to smoke, and thoughts on potential new restrictions on where smoking cannot occur. Data collection allows you to learn resident's concerns, questions, and potential areas of conflict. It is an important tool to create meaningful and targeted resident outreach about why and how a policy is being adopted, which will assist with implementation and enforcement. (See *Resources & Tools for Smokefree Multi-Family Housing* [<https://no-smoke.org/resources-tools-smokefree-multi-unit-housing/>] for sample resident survey(s)).
- **Educate about exposure at home.** Choose educational messages that will resonate well with residents. Impactful messaging may include information on exposure in the home from other resident's smoke, the desire to protect your family's health, the ability reduce children's asthma and other health issues, and the right to have a cleaner, healthier and safer living environment for all residents.
- **Clarify misconceptions about smokefree housing.** Residents who smoke do not have to quit and do not have to move. They simply cannot smoke in the areas specified in the policy. It's not about the smoker, it's about the smoke. A smokefree policy allows everyone in the building to breathe cleaner air, including smokers and their families.
- **Community meetings:** Help host informational community meetings for residents and housing providers, both when a policy is being considered and before it is implemented. Work with partners who have existing relationships in the housing community to be seen as a trusted resource, such as community health workers and asthma programs. Provide information on how to access cessation resources. Allow residents the space to voice concerns and be heard. Acknowledging and addressing resident concerns can help the adoption and implementation of a new policy happen more smoothly.
- **Encourage residents to share their stories.** Collect residents' stories of being impacted by secondhand smoke. It is their home and their lives being impacted, and helping empower residents to share their stories and perspectives can both provide more impetus for adopting a policy and create more buy-in from residents.
- **Culturally appropriate outreach.** Aim to have surveys, educational information, community meetings, signage, and other outreach be culturally appropriate. Have materials available in additional languages. Invite bi-lingual speakers to community meetings. Work with trusted community partners to outreach to residents and attend meetings.

Partnerships and Collaboration

Consider how smokefree housing efforts and existing health and housing programs can work collaboratively to address issues of mutual concern. Building partnerships and collaborating with community stakeholders that are interested in smokefree housing will make your efforts more effective.

Partnerships with groups that have existing relationships with the housing community are very beneficial to becoming seen as a trusted ally. See how developing smokefree housing programs can build upon their expertise, trust, and connections with residents and/or local housing providers.

- What are areas of common concern?
- How can you collaborate to achieve mutual goals?
- How can you share resources and expertise?

For example, consider if questions about smoking in the home and reported smoke exposure from other units could be added to checklists or surveys done by asthma programs, code enforcement inspectors, or healthy homes outreach.

Reach out to the network of smokefree housing expertise around the U.S.

As you start work on smokefree housing, you do not need to reinvent the wheel because many tools and resources are available. You can turn to smokefree housing projects and partners around the country for advice and experience.

For additional information, resources, and links to smokefree housing projects around the country, visit our Homes page at: no-smoke.org/at-risk-places/homes/

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