

Key Recommendations: The Role of State Health Agencies in Smoke-Free Housing

Executive Summary

From October 2016 through February 2017, ASTHO convened a smoke-free housing virtual learning community to share challenges, lessons learned, and best practices among participating states. Six states participated in the virtual learning community: Arkansas, Indiana, Louisiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. These states were selected based on public housing stock, diverse geographic makeup, and population demographics that reflect secondhand smoke exposure disparity trends. The state teams convened for a kickoff call, two virtual learning sessions, and two technical assistance webinars. ASTHO developed session content and recruited expert speakers based on topics of interest from participants and new developments in smoke-free housing work. The following key recommendations are a compilation of findings from the smoke-free housing virtual learning community, informed by ASTHO's work with members, affiliates, and partner organizations to identify elements of successful smoke-free housing programs led by state health agencies.

During the virtual learning community convening period, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) issued a [final rule](#) requiring smoke-free policies in all federally-funded public housing. Given this policy change, the virtual learning community included a special focus on supporting public housing authorities (PHAs), sometimes known as public housing agencies or housing commissions. The key recommendations also incorporate specific information about supporting HUD rule implementation, as well as provide broader findings to leverage state health agencies as the coordinator of statewide smoke-free housing efforts and to highlight opportunities for collaboration to expand secondhand smoke protection in multi-unit housing.

The key recommendations span the following topics:

- Build relationships with the housing industry.
- Communicate and disseminate information and materials.
- Collaborate with local and community partners.
- Support residents in the smoke-free policy transition.
- Support implementation of the HUD rule.

ASTHO hopes that the key findings will serve as a resource for state health officials and tobacco control staff as they continue to develop and refine smoke-free housing programs in partnership with local and community partners.

Build Relationships with the Housing Industry

Smoke-free housing work inherently requires cross-sector partnership and a target focus on property managers and owners who have the authority to adopt a smoke-free policy. State health agencies have a leadership role to play in building bridges between the public health and housing sectors, opening the door for robust connections across the state between local and community partners and housing industry professionals.

- Join housing industry trade associations and encourage local and community partners to do the same. Trade associations are important resources for learning about the housing industry and gaining access to key decisionmakers (e.g., property managers and owners).¹ Becoming an active member of these organizations increases visibility of smoke-free housing efforts and helps state and local partners immerse themselves in the housing sector while building trust and relationships with property managers and owners.
- Learn about what motivates housing industry professionals in order to craft and deliver key messages about the benefits of smoke-free housing policies that will resonate with decisionmakers. The economic argument is often persuasive, especially for private housing owners and managers.² Prepare to overcome common misperceptions that they may have.
- Leverage opportunities to create larger systems change, even across state lines. Some property management companies oversee multiple properties in a single state or multiple states. State health agency leadership has credibility to access senior leadership of property management companies and encourage them to adopt smoke-free policies across a portfolio.
- Offer support to property managers at every stage of the policy implementation and enforcement process. In addition, help managers prepare residents for the transition, by hosting community meetings to inform residents about the policy, for instance, or by offering cessation resources for those who wish to quit smoking.
- Attend and present at housing industry conferences and meetings. Successful presentations may address the why and how of smoke-free policies, and incorporate a testimonial from a housing industry champion. Host exhibit booths at industry trade shows.
- Build relationships with government officials in the housing sector, such as city housing inspectors, to gain their partnership in disseminating information about smoke-free policies to their constituents.

Communicate and Disseminate Information and Materials

A unified message from state health agencies as well as local and community partners helps spread awareness about smoke-free housing and communicate information consistently. State health agencies can lead this effort, harnessing state-level resources as well as those available nationally.

- Provide standard materials (e.g., sample policy language³) to housing providers as well as local and community public health partners to disseminate. Include an economic perspective in

¹ Consider identifying local affiliates of the [National Apartment Association](#) and the [National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials](#).

² Economic benefits of smoke-free policies can come in the form of a market advantage of attracting renters who desire to live smoke-free, decreased turnover costs, lower insurance premiums due to reduced risk of fire, and more. Find additional information about the economic evidence for smoke-free policies from [Live Smoke Free](#) (a program in Minnesota) and [ChangeLab Solutions](#).

³ [Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights](#) and the [Public Health Law Center](#) offer model policy language for download.

communication materials to appeal to business-driven property managers and owners. Incorporate health-centered messages in materials geared toward residents.

- Engage property managers and PHA directors who are champions of smoke-free housing policies to share testimonials about the benefits of policy adoption with other housing industry decisionmakers.
- Incorporate information about health equity into messaging where appropriate to raise awareness about the power of smoke-free policies to reduce secondhand smoke exposure among multi-unit housing residents.⁴
- Prepare to answer frequently asked questions about enforcement, policy timelines, and how to address e-cigarettes in the development of the policy.
- Support a media campaign about smoke-free housing throughout the state.
- Leverage national education campaign materials to promote cessation.⁵

Collaborate with Local and Community Partners

Local health departments and other community-level partners provide direct support to property managers and owners, advancing smoke-free housing policy implementation efforts across a state. State health agencies are critical to establishing the tools and resources that local and community partners can funnel into the field, encouraging a coordinated and collaborative implementation plan. State-level leadership can engage local health departments and community partners in a variety of ways, harnessing the distinct role each plays.

- Convene local health departments and other community partners, providing technical assistance and training to advance their efforts and skills. Encourage a unified message and provide materials that partners can use to disseminate information and build relationships in the field with property managers, owners, and residents. Training may focus on the approach to smoke-free housing, which differs from traditional tobacco control work, as it requires distinct messaging for an economically-driven industry.
- Establish partnerships with leaders and organizations that are well-respected in the housing industry, such as housing attorneys and fair housing agencies. Leverage these relationships to disseminate smoke-free housing information and encourage partnership at the local and community level.
- Learn from local and community partners' reports of successes and barriers in the field. Utilize the information to reassess and inform strategies, training, and technical assistance needs to support effective outreach.

⁴ Though housing decisionmakers may be motivated by the effect of smoke-free policies on their bottom line, it is helpful to convey the added benefit of reduced secondhand smoke exposure, since, according to the 2015 CDC Vital Signs Report, [Secondhand Smoke: An Unequal Danger](#), the home is one of the main places of exposure. This report also highlights that exposure is more likely among children, blacks, people living below the poverty level, and renters—populations that are likely to live in public housing. Smoke-free housing policies reduce preventable and involuntary secondhand smoke exposure in the home, while encouraging those who smoke to quit. These points and others outlined in the report are a helpful evidence base upon which to build health equity messages.

⁵ For example, the CDC *Tips*[™] webpage for [Organizations Serving Public Housing Residents](#) contains information and resources for state and HUD audiences related to cessation, including flyers about quitting smoking available for download. State health agencies can customize the flyers with local information by contacting the [CDC Media Campaign Resource Center](#) at mcrc@cdc.gov. Additionally, *Tips* campaign posters that are tailored for use in and around HUD housing are available under the HUD tab on the [Tips Campaign Download Center](#).

- Maintain transparency between funded agencies to help local and community partners to understand their role, expectations of partners, and leverage resources.
- Capitalize on opportunities for partners who have developed subject matter expertise to provide training or peer support to other local or community partners.
- Celebrate successes alongside local and community partners while recognizing what may not work and adapting methods.

Support Residents in the Smoke-Free Policy Transition

Though housing industry decisionmakers are the primary target of smoke-free housing programs, it is important to dedicate some program time to help multi-unit housing residents transition to living in a smoke-free community. Resident-focused efforts help property management by promoting policy compliance, with the added benefit of encouraging healthy lifestyles. State health agencies can assist with providing state-level resources that local and community partners can provide when working with residents in the field.

- Make cessation resources available without being forceful. Offer resources as the policy is adopted and after it is in place, as residents who smoke may be ready to quit at different times throughout the transition. Connect residents to state quitlines and local cessation programs either directly or by way of property management, such as by sharing a one-page list that outlines cessation resources available in the state or at the local level.
- For public housing, leverage existing CDC resources specifically for PHA managers that address secondhand smoke.⁶ Coordinate with healthcare service providers within and near public housing, such as Federally Qualified Health Centers and the [Public Housing Primary Care Program](#), to ensure cessation resources are available and accessible to residents.
- Coordinate with local and community partners to identify opportunities to train peer cessation counselors in multi-unit housing as an additional way to promote on-going resources and support for resident cessation.⁷
- Offer education (bilingual when needed) to residents through community meetings and presentations about the health and safety benefits of smoke-free living in addition to cessation resources. This provides credibility when coming from a public health professional.
- Encourage property management to include residents in the policy development, implementation, and maintenance phases. Having residents at the table from the beginning helps to increase buy-in with the policy and to develop it in a way that addresses resident needs.
- Field concerns about secondhand smoke from residents through an email inbox or phone line. Direct residents to resources to overcome these challenges.

⁶ The CDC *Tips*[™] webpage for [Organizations Serving Public Housing Residents](#) includes information about secondhand smoke for HUD housing managers and highlights resources such as a [CDC infographic](#) and [Vital Signs Report on Secondhand Smoke](#).

⁷ An expert who presented during a virtual learning session of the smoke-free housing virtual learning community highlighted an example of a peer cessation counseling training program. The [National Community Health Worker Training Center's](#) Tobacco Cessation course (4.0 hour Continuing Education Units), a free, self-paced training is available [online](#) in English or Spanish. Though geared toward community health workers, any health professional can take the training.

Support Implementation of the HUD Rule

HUD's final rule, which requires all PHAs to adopt smoke-free policies, is an important milestone in smoke-free housing work. While over 600 PHAs had already implemented smoke-free policies as described in the final rule, many more must take steps to adhere to the guidance and timelines outlined in the rule. CDC has initiated contact with all PHAs to share information, including information about the tobacco control programs within each state health department. State health agencies are essential to coordinate resources across the state to ensure public housing authority leadership have the information and support they need to effectively implement smoke-free policies.

- Create a coordinated strategy with local and community partners to deliver targeted technical assistance to PHAs throughout the state. Develop a list of PHAs in the state as a starting point, utilizing HUD's [directory](#) of PHAs.⁸ Initiate contact with each PHA on the list (or at least those that may not have a smoke-free policy based on program records) and discuss the HUD rule and resources available at the state, local, and community level to support the policy change, indicating a point of contact for more information and technical assistance. Offerings can include:
 - Toolkits including sample letters, policy language, cessation information, door hangers, window clings, posters, and other materials to help the PHA with the transition.
 - Help to administer surveys to residents about their support for smoke-free policies; findings generally show majority support and can be useful to share back with residents.
 - Referral to state, local, and community organizations that can provide tools and guidance on policy development and implementation, as well as resident education.
 - Connection to local PHAs that have already transitioned to smoke-free in order to facilitate peer-to-peer support.
 - Coordination with nearby healthcare providers and clinics to organize outreach and cessation resources for residents.
- Contact the [Public Housing Field Office](#) to establish a relationship and synchronize efforts. Field staff are a resource to facilitate contact with PHAs if they have been nonresponsive to outreach or to help with supporting PHAs experiencing resident pushback with the rule.
- Host a meeting or webinar for PHAs to provide an educational presentation on implementing the HUD rule and support available to assist PHAs in the transition. Incorporate peer education by including a testimonial from a PHA leader who has already implemented a smoke-free policy.
- Prepare to address common questions such as whether to incorporate e-cigarettes into the policy language, as the HUD rule gives decisionmakers discretion (but does not require them) to prohibit use of e-cigarettes.
- Consider sending additional communications to PHAs at a later date, such as mailing a toolkit or making a follow-up phone call to field technical assistance needs of PHAs.⁹

⁸ State-level staff from Iowa, who presented during the first technical assistance webinar of the smoke-free housing virtual learning community, shared that it was challenging to find information about PHAs. To gather accurate contact information about each PHA and their properties, they emailed each PHA requesting information. The team compiled the information into a database on their [program website](#). It is publicly available to allow local and community grantees to use it to guide public housing outreach. As an added benefit, PHAs can use the database to identify and connect with peers. More information about the Iowa program can be found in a multi-level case study ASTHO conducted, highlighted in the Additional Resources section.

⁹ For example, the Iowa team assessed specific concerns and needs of PHAs through their outreach. They identified three major concerns and tailored their technical assistance to PHAs in these areas.

Final Thoughts

Smoke-free housing work builds momentum for new methods in public health, focused on cross-sector collaboration to promote health and achieve positive outcomes through new venues. The smoke-free housing virtual learning community was an opportunity to convene states at various stages of smoke-free housing program development to learn from one another and expert speakers. The lessons learned that informed these key recommendations will assist state health agencies and their partners in expanding smoke-free policies in multi-unit housing and supporting PHAs in implementing the HUD rule. At the core, the recommendations reflect the importance of a coordinated effort in supporting housing providers in policy adoption and implementation to achieve a smooth transition, avoiding unintended consequences. ASTHO will continue to serve as a resource for state health agencies working on smoke-free housing, as well as a connector between states and national organizations to continue progress.

Additional Resources

- [Iowa and North Carolina Reduce Secondhand Smoke Exposure through Partnerships with Property Owners and Local Health Departments](#), a multi-level case study ASTHO conducted in 2016.
- [Recording](#) and [slides](#) for Health at Home: Adult Smoking and Adverse Childhood Experiences in Multi-Unit Housing, a virtual event ASTHO hosted in 2017 that featured an interdisciplinary panel discussing the intersection between adverse childhood experiences, secondhand smoke exposure, and smoke-free multi-unit housing policies.
- [Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights website](#) dedicated to smoke-free homes, including downloadable model policies for public housing and other resources.
- [Smoke-Free Public Housing website](#) created in partnership by the American Lung Association in Minnesota, Live Smoke Free, the Minnesota Department of Health, and the Public Health Law Center; a useful model with resources and information about the HUD rule for property managers and directors, as well as residents.
- [Housing Policy Guides](#), a series of guides ASTHO developed that identify federal, state, and local policies, programs, and initiatives that encourage healthy housing through Health in All Policies approaches. The resource addresses indoor air quality and other health promotion topics that can be integrated into the housing arena.

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