



First Steps Towards Making Affordable Housing Smoke-Free

This fact sheet answers common questions the public health community and others may have when they begin to advocate for smoke-free housing policies in low-income or subsidized multi-unit housing. It offers suggestions on how to find affordable housing providers and educate them about smoke-free policies, and recommends potential allies for collaboration on smoke-free housing policy initiatives. This fact sheet supplements the Consortium's other publications on smoke-free affordable housing including: [Creating Smoke-Free Affordable Housing](#), [Secondhand Smoke Seepage into Multi-Unit Affordable Housing](#), [Subsidized Housing and Smoke-free Policies](#), and [Comparison of Smoke-Free Housing Policy Factors: Private Market Rate versus Publicly Subsidized Multi-Unit Housing](#).¹

Q: How do I locate affordable housing developments in my community?

A: The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has a [searchable database](#) listing public housing authorities across the country.² Another great resource is your state's housing finance agency. This organization usually has a listing of all properties that have received a special federal tax credit available for low-income housing developments (commonly called Section 42 credits, referring to the section of the federal tax code). You may also want to explore a specific city or county website using terms like "housing" or "community development" to see if any planning efforts are underway for low-income housing developments and to identify which departments or agencies are involved.



To learn more about non-governmental affordable housing developers and operators, contact organizations that offer assistance to low-income residents, such as social services agencies, fair housing councils, legal aid attorneys, and tenant advocacy organizations. These groups can be invaluable in introducing you to the key players who provide affordable housing in your community.

Q: How do I find affordable housing providers?

A: The best way to connect with owners and operators of affordable housing is to join their trade associations. As a member, you will be able to receive their publications, subscribe to their blogs, and attend their meetings and conferences. This is a great way to learn more about the specific issues and challenges facing affordable housing providers. To locate groups in your state, the National Low Income Housing Coalition has a [listing of partner organizations](#) that work statewide.³ Another useful trade organization is the [National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials](#), which has regional and state chapters.⁴

Q: How do I educate affordable housing providers about smoke-free housing?

A: One effective way to do outreach is to set up an exhibit booth at an affordable housing association or agency conference. Having a table with information about smoke-free housing can help you start conversations with providers who might not know about this concept yet. You may also meet some “early adopters” – those who have already implemented a smoke-free policy for their housing complex. Make sure to get their contact information and ask them to join your educational efforts, as they can be your most valuable spokespersons to influence their peers about the benefits and ease of implementing a smoke-free housing policy.

Giving presentations at local community meetings or trade association conferences can also be an excellent opportunity to educate affordable housing providers about smoke-free housing policies. When submitting a conference abstract, try to include speakers whose stories will be particularly influential to your target audience, such as a low-income renter who has been affected by drifting secondhand smoke or a housing provider who has implemented a smoke-free policy. Presenting at local meetings can also be very effective. Many times, organizers of regularly scheduled meetings are looking for speakers on interesting topics. By contacting the organizer and offering to talk, even for a few minutes, you can begin to introduce people to the possibility of smoke-free housing.

Another way to communicate with affordable housing providers is by publishing an article about smoke-free housing in their newsletters, magazines, or their blogs. When submitting an article idea to the publisher, think of some different approaches to present your interesting and useful information. One format might be a “Q&A” with an attorney answering common legal questions people might have about implementing a smoke-free housing policy.

To complement all your outreach and educational activities, develop a packet of informational materials to distribute to affordable housing providers. Numerous resources have already been developed by smoke-free housing advocates working across the country, and most are willing and eager to share their materials with you. The

Consortium's [Creating Smoke-Free Affordable Housing Tips & Tools](#) contains links to some organizations you may want to contact for their outreach materials. Another way to learn more about existing educational materials is by joining the National Smoke-Free Housing listserv sponsored by the Smoke-Free Environments Law Project. To learn more about the listserv, send an e-mail to: SFELP@tcsg.org.

Q: What influential messages can I use with affordable housing providers when promoting smoke-free housing policies?

A: The goal of affordable housing organizations is to provide low-cost, safe, and healthy housing to the most vulnerable members of our community – including the elderly, children, and people with disabilities. Many housing providers, however, are completely unaware of the serious health risks that even limited exposure to drifting secondhand smoke can have on the populations they serve. It is crucial to educate them about the negative health effects exposure to secondhand smoke can cause and the importance of creating smoke-free living environments.

Describing a smoke-free housing policy as necessary for advancing social justice and equity can be key in motivating providers to implement a policy. It is the very people that affordable housing providers hope to serve – people with limited or fixed incomes – who are most likely to suffer from chronic diseases and disabilities that are made worse when exposed to secondhand smoke. Because of their limited financial resources, these renters have few options to escape from the drifting smoke infiltrating their apartment. Instead, they remain trapped, often with no way to mitigate the smoke but to close their windows, put towels under their doors, and hope for the best. More affluent renters have choices about living in smoke-free environments: they may be able to afford to move if a neighbor's smoke is bothering them, or they may be able to live in a market-rate apartment complex that is already smoke-free. Smoke-free living should not depend on one's income level.

You might also want to point out that smoke-free affordable housing is a growing trend across the country and that policies have been adopted by very large public housing authorities with thousands of units – as well as by small rural providers with only a dozen or so units. Moreover, HUD – the primary funder of subsidized housing – is encouraging federally subsidized housing providers to implement smoke-free policies. For more information about the smoke-free housing memos issued by HUD, as well as a list of public housing authorities that have adopted smoke-free policies, see the Consortium's [Creating Smoke-Free Affordable Housing publication](#).

In addition to emphasizing the social and health equity aspects of a smoke-free housing policy, share messages about the cost savings associated with the policy. These messages include the significant savings in turnover and maintenance costs an affordable housing provider could accrue after implementing a smoke-free policy, along with the possibility of lowered insurance premiums because of the reduced risk of fire. It is also important to help affordable housing providers understand that smoke-free housing policies are legal, do not unlawfully discriminate against tenants who smoke, and do not violate renters'

privacy rights. For more information about these aspects of a smoke-free housing policy, see the Consortium's [Regulating Smoking in Multi-Unit Housing](#) and [Creating Smoke-Free Affordable Housing](#).

Q: What type of organizations might I collaborate with when working to achieve smoke-free affordable housing?

A: Inviting stakeholders to join a coalition or advisory board to help guide your smoke-free housing work can be invaluable. Stakeholders can help formulate strategies, test messaging and educational materials, and introduce key decision makers. Perhaps a multi-disciplinary stakeholder group engaged in affordable housing issues is already in your community. If so, joining that coalition and exploring the possibility of making smoke-free housing a priority for them could also be an effective approach.

Some potential partners – whether forming a new group or joining an existing one – could be:

- Asthma prevention programs
- Medical providers, such as pediatricians and pulmonologists
- Fire fighters and emergency responders
- Community clinics, health educators, and promoters
- Fair housing councils and other tenant advocacy organizations
- Legal Aid societies
- Elected officials interested in housing, equity, seniors, children, health
- Local government staff involved with affordable housing, code enforcement, social services, public health, and environmental health
- Local affordable housing providers who are interested in or have implemented a smoke-free housing policy

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Notes

¹ See the Public Health Law Center website, available at www.publichealthlawcenter.org.

² See U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, available at http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/public_indian_housing/pha/contacts.

³ See State Partners & State Level Information, available at <http://www.nlihc.org/partners/map.cfm>.

⁴ See NAHRO Building Communities Together, available at <http://www.nahro.org>.