

PANDEMIC HIGHLIGHTS IMPORTANCE OF SMOKE-FREE HOUSING FOR BIDDEFORD FAMILIES

Issue/Need

With the understanding that many youth are currently at home due to COVID-19 restrictions, York County Tobacco Prevention Coordinators wanted to make an impact in the setting that many youth are now spending their time; their homes.

The 2019 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey asked Maine middle and high school students about a variety of risk factors regarding tobacco use and exposure. Within this survey, students were asked, "During the past 7 days, on how many days were you in the same room with someone who was smoking cigarettes?" Of those youth survey respondents in York County, 23.7% of high school students and 19.5% of middle school students answered at least 1 day.

Additionally, when asked, "Besides yourself, does anyone who lives in your home smoke cigarettes now," approximately 30% of middle and high school York County students answered 'yes.'

Intervention

In hopes of reaching youth, families, and the communities in which they live during this unprecedented time, York County Coordinators reached out to local housing authorities. Coordinators created a flyer, highlighting many of the surprising statistics relating tobacco use and exposure to multi-unit housing living conditions and overall cost. That flyer was then sent out to local communities in order to increase awareness of policy importance in the multi-unit housing setting.



Biddeford Housing Authority, in particular, was very interested in offering policy updates and implementation recommendations to landlords within the association. Together, a York County Coordinator worked with numerous landlords of the housing association. Many landlords were thrilled to hear of local support, guiding policy work for this setting in regards to tobacco. Although some landlords mentioned that they had more brief policies of their own, they were excited to implement more comprehensive policy to their housing complexes. Other landlords, however, did not currently have strict guidelines in terms of tobacco products for their residents, and were interested in adoption based off of the flyer's statistics and recommendations, to "directly help the community become increasingly tobacco-free."

Results

In three short months, the success of York County's multi-unit housing policy outreach resulted in six smoke-free policies. The six policies that were adopted within the cities and towns of Biddeford, Waterboro and South Portland, cover 14 buildings, 40 units and 93 tenants. These policies, which create smoke-free environments for tenants, also aid in reducing second-hand smoke exposure, property damage, and overall property turnover costs.

Sustainability

With interest continuing to build in the Biddeford area, as well as in surrounding communities, York County Coordinators are hopeful that continued outreach and prevention efforts will be impactful throughout the County. In hopes of reaching families, and youth, during a period of increased time indoors at home, policy may serve as an even more significant component in reducing secondhand smoking rates.

For more information, contact:



Alexa Christie

alchristie@smhc.org