

Case Study: Creating an Effective No-Smoking Policy & Smoking Cessation Referral Program at the Housing Authority of Portland

Background

In 2006, the American Lung Association in Oregon (ALAO) and its community partners began conducting outreach to the Housing Authority of Portland (HAP) to explore implementing a no-smoking policy at its properties. ALAO is a founding member of the Portland-Vancouver Metro Area Smokefree Housing Project, which mission is to reduce renters' exposure to secondhand smoke by increasing the number of no-smoking policies in multi-unit housing.

As HAP moved along with its policy process, the American Lung Association in Oregon, in collaboration with Bricoleur LLC, began working with HAP to develop a plan to support residents who were interested in quitting. **Our work focused on: 1) clear communication about smoking, 2) encouraging best practices in treatment support and policy change, 3) data collection and analysis, 4) staff training and 5) evaluation.**

1. Clear Communication

ALAO and Bricoleur started with what we knew about tobacco, smoking and the effects of secondhand smoke. It is important to talk about what the best science has taught us about smoking. We consistently communicated the following points to HAP leadership:

- there is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke;
- smoking is concentrating among specific populations, many of which are served by housing authorities (people who are low-income, lack insurance, or struggle with homelessness, substance abuse issues or mental illness);
- many market rate multi-unit housing providers are going smokefree;
- the only effective policy to protect residents' health and the property is making all units smokefree; and
- one of the best ways to prepare to go smokefree is to conduct a survey of residents

We also started by listening. We listened to the suggestions and concerns of residents and management, taking that feedback seriously. Here is what we found worked best to get the best understanding of HAP:

- we met with staff leadership and found out where decisions get made and who has the most influence and responsibility for smoking policy;
- site visits were planned and we interviewed staff where they work. This is the best way to find out what is happening on a day to day basis;
- ALAO conducted a comprehensive survey of residents to gather valid data on prevalence, rules they have about smoking and their opinions of a smokefree policy; and

- throughout our work with the housing authority we kept in regular contact with HAP staff leadership even though those contacts changed over time.

2. Best Practices in Treatment Support & Policy Change

HAP considered a variety of options for going smokefree including transitioning certain buildings, designating some units smokefree, or grandfathering in smokers. In the end they chose a comprehensive policy following the best practices for health and safety.

ALAO & Bricoleur always advocated for these best practices in policy development and supportive treatment for residents. We were always clear that smokefree policies:

- are comprehensive. We knew it could take several months or even years to get a comprehensive smokefree policy;
- have a treatment component or referral to quit resources;
- focus on addressing tobacco use through existing providers and support staff through brief non-confrontational interactions and referrals; and
- are clearly communicated and effectively and equally enforced.

3. Data Collection and Analysis

Surveys can be a challenge to implement but they provide useful information to leadership of housing agencies and their residents. The survey tool that ALAO used at HAP was based on a tool originally developed for the Housing Authority of King County in Seattle. The key elements of our survey of HAP residents were:

- a measure of smoking prevalence. HAP leadership wanted to know how many of their residents smoked;
- asking residents about smoking rules in their own homes;
- finding out whether residents experienced secondhand smoke in their units and how much it bothered them or if it made them sick;
- asking residents what they do when they are bothered by secondhand smoke;
- determining the kind of no-smoking policies residents would support, starting from the most restrictive option to the least restrictive;
- asking residents who smoke whether they would avail themselves of quit resources if they were offered; and
- organizing the survey results in a way that was useful to HAP staff. We segmented the results into two populations that represent a large portion of HAP residents—families, and the elderly and people with disabilities. HAP staff was interested in comparing each group's level of support for a no-smoking policy.

4. Training Staff at All Levels

Once HAP was ready to go smokefree, ALAO & Bricoleur worked with staff at all levels to develop concise messages about the policy to use with each other and with residents, so that implementation would be clear and supportive. The key elements of this training included:

- an explanation of survey results and response rates;
- a concise factual explanation of why the agency is going smokefree. Just as important was confirming that going smokefree is not a punitive or exclusionary measure;
- straightforward, easy to understand protocols about enforcement;
- role playing exercises on how to communicate with residents about the policy;
- role playing exercises on how to be supportive of a resident who wants to quit; and
- grounding in the 5 A's Behavior Change Model (Ask, Advise, Assess, Assist and Arrange) and how to refer and follow up with residents.

5. Evaluation

Evaluating the success of the policy change implementation is useful to other housing providers and to tobacco prevention advocates. As of this writing, evaluation of HAP's efforts to implement a policy and support residents who want to quit is ongoing. The major elements of our evaluation are:

- process oriented—the main evaluation question is: “Are the protocols for communication and support being implemented, are staff comfortable with the protocols, and are residents getting what they need in terms of clarity and support?”
- focus on whether residents feel clear about the policy and supported if they decide they want help quitting, rather than how many residents quit;
- making it part of the process. If there are referrals to outside agencies, HAP is collecting that information using the data collection method for referrals already in use;
- reviewing and improving implementation in the months before and after the policy change; and
- use of pre and post tests at staff trainings, with follow up focus group or survey with staff and residents after the policy change.

Conclusion

As of August 1st, 2009, the Housing Authority of Portland will have a no-smoking policy in effect in all of its public housing units. The new policy prohibits smoking inside apartment units, indoor common areas, and within 10 feet of the building, including patios, porches and balconies. This new policy will affect a total of 37 properties and 1,993 public housing units. In addition, HAP is expected to extend the no-smoking policy to their affordable housing portfolio (3,760 units) by August 2010.

HAP made the decision to go smokefree based on three main reasons: 1) Health effects of secondhand smoke on residents and employees, 2) Strong resident support of a no-smoking policy demonstrated in the 2008 resident survey, and 3) Cost savings from an asset management standpoint (decreased turn-over expenses, reduced risk of fires, etc.).

No-smoking policies are a national trend in both market rate and affordable and public housing. More and more housing providers are realizing that no-smoking policies are good for business and good for health. Tobacco prevention agencies can assist housing providers in implementing these policies by providing effective communication, data collection and analysis, smoking cessation resources, staff training and evaluation.

Housing Authority of Portland's Timeline: Transition to No-Smoking Policy

2006:

- The American Lung Association in Oregon (ALAO), along with community partners, begins first outreach to the Housing Authority of Portland (HAP)
- HAP joins The Portland-Vancouver Metro Area Smokefree Housing Project's Advisory Board

2007:

- December: HAP agrees to conduct resident survey through ALAO, with support from the Multnomah County Health Department

2008:

- February-March: ALAO conducts resident survey – mails 2,000 surveys to public housing residents and an additional 500 surveys to affordable housing residents. ALAO hires Bricoleur LLC to analyze survey responses.
- February: Training on the “5 A’s” Behavior Change Model conducted for housing authority staff by Bricoleur LLC through ALAO
- Summer: ALAO and Bricoleur present survey findings and discuss policy options with HAP's Real Estate Operations Department
- Fall/Winter: Real Estate Operations Department moves policy forward internally in HAP, including presentations to executive management team and HAP's board.

2009:

- January: Meeting between HAP, ALAO, Bricoleur & Multnomah County Health Department to finalize roll-out plan for new no-smoking policy. HAP's plan is to implement a no-smoking policy at 37 public housing properties, with a total of 1,993 units.
- February: HAP announces no-smoking policy to residents and begins 60-day public comment period.
- February-March: HAP holds a total of 19 resident meetings to explain policy; ALAO, Multnomah County Health and Bricoleur attend meetings and provide smoking cessation information
- April: 45 HAP resident service coordinators and site management staff participate in “Supportive Engagement of Residents” training led by Bricoleur and ALAO.
- May 1st: Effective date of no-smoking policy for *new* public housing residents at HAP
- August 1st: Effective date of no-smoking policy for *all* public housing residents at HAP

The American Lung Association in Oregon

www.lungoregon.org

The American Lung Association in Oregon (ALAO), founded in 1915, is the oldest nonprofit health organization in Oregon. ALAO's mission is to prevent lung disease and promote lung health. ALAO provides services, education and advocacy that lead to cleaner air and a reduced incidence of respiratory illness.

ALAO has a history of working on tobacco prevention and education with emphasis on policy development and focus on strategies that will produce sustainable and systematic change. Our projects are driven by our mission and utilize evidence-based best practices or provide research results that have the potential to move promising practices to become a recognized best practice in the field of tobacco control.

ALAO's smokefree multi-unit housing initiative is a successful example of a promising practice utilizing collaboration between our non-profit organization, local county health departments, and a variety of non-traditional partners who together make up the leadership team of the Portland-Vancouver Metro Area Smokefree Housing Project. ALAO formed close working relationships with businesses and organizations in the housing sector to establish credibility and a supportive structure for the creation of smokefree environments in multi-unit housing.

Bricoleur LLC

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Roger Valdez is the bricoleur behind Bricoleur LLC. Roger has worked as a campaign manager, lobbyist, legislative aid and program manager. He currently is a research associate at the Sightline Institute, a sustainability think tank. Before that he was legislative aide for City Councilmember Peter Steinbrueck, manager of the Tobacco Prevention Program at Public Health Seattle King County and served as Regional Health Officer for Seattle. As a Neighborhood Development Manager for the South West Sector in the City's Department of Neighborhoods, he worked on implementing neighborhood plans.

Roger's work in public health and in neighborhood development has always focused on creating mutually beneficial partnerships between the public and private sector to enhance public space and effectively integrate economic development, neighborhood values, health, arts and culture into the planning and development of the built environment.

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For more information about smokefree housing, please visit: www.smokefreehousingNW.com