



**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

**Meeker McLeod Sibley**  
Community Health Services

For immediate release

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## **Smoke-free public housing cuts secondhand smoke exposure by nearly half**

Smoke-free policies have the potential to provide healthier environments at multifamily, public housing while also motivating residents to smoke less or quit smoking, according to a new study by the Minnesota Department of Health's Office of Statewide Health Improvement Initiatives (OSHII).

The eight public housing properties in this study implemented smoke-free policy changes after working with local public health agencies through the Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP).

After the smoke-free policies were implemented, the MDH study found a 46 percent drop in frequent indoor secondhand smoke exposure among non-smokers. In addition, 77 percent of smokers reported reducing the amount that they smoke and 5 percent reported that they had quit. Smokers noted the policy change was as much of a factor in their reduced smoking as wanting to improve their health.

According to Allie Freidrichs, Meeker-McLeod-Sibley Community Health Services Director, "a significant benefit to this work is that the people that are most vulnerable - elderly, children, and people with asthma and other respiratory diseases, are protected from exposure to toxic chemicals contained in secondhand smoke."

SHIP grantees are working across Minnesota to help implement smoke-free policies at public housing and privately owned properties in their communities to ensure greater access to quality, smoke-free housing. For Meeker-McLeod-Sibley SHIP, we have worked with over 50 properties locally on smoke free housing since SHIP began in 2009.

Smoke in housing developments can easily pass from one unit to another through walls, doors and shared ventilation systems. In the MDH study, the percentage of residents reporting exposure to secondhand smoke a few times per month decreased from 44 percent to 23.6 percent after the properties went smoke free.

The work by SHIP grantees and their partners puts the state in a strong position to prepare for proposed changes by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) that would prohibit the use of cigarettes, cigars or pipes in all public housing living units, indoor common

areas, administrative offices, and possibly outdoor areas within 25 feet of housing and administrative office buildings. The final rule is expected in the fall of 2016.

HUD estimates that annual cost savings nationally from eliminating smoking in public housing would be \$153 million; the bulk of the savings would come from reduced health care costs related to secondhand smoke. In Minnesota, smoking causes more than \$2.5 billion in medical costs annually.

For a second component of this evaluation, MDH interviewed local public health staff and property managers and owners of affordable housing properties who have implemented smoke-free housing policies.

Factors that led to greater implementation and enforcement success included educating staff and residents on the adverse health effects of second and third-hand smoke (residual nicotine and other toxins left on indoor surfaces by tobacco smoke), receiving assistance from experts such as local public health staff and technical assistance providers, emphasizing the economic benefits of going smoke free and practicing consistent enforcement policies.

Get more information about the MDH evaluation study [here](#).

To learn more about local work on smoke-free multifamily housing, contact Jean Johnson at (320) 864-1376 or Allie Freidrichs at (507) 766-3531.

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