

CASE STUDY FOCUS



FOUNDATION FOR HEALTHY GENERATIONS (FORMERLY COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH EDUCATION FOUNDATION)

Advancing No-Smoking Policies in Public Housing

BACKGROUND

Washington State has been advancing no-smoking policies in Public Housing Authorities since 2009. This is in large part due to quality, collaborative partnerships involving the Washington State Department of Health, Foundation for Healthy Generations (Healthy Gen), the Pacific Northwest Regional Council of the National Association of Housing, and Redevelopment Officials (PNRC-NAHRO), the Association of Washington Housing Authorities (AWHA), Public Housing Authorities, and local health departments.

In Washington, as in the rest of the nation, the prevalence of smoking remains higher among low-income and otherwise disadvantaged populations, most of which are housed in disproportionate numbers in housing authority properties. The creation of voluntary no-smoking policies in multi-unit housing is one of several environmental strategies implemented by the Department of Health to reduce tobacco-related disparities and health inequities. In a notice first published in 2009, the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) “strongly encourages (Public Housing Authorities) to implement smoke-free policies in some or all of their public housing units.”¹ This notice was later re-issued in 2011. The notice explains the benefits for the health of residents as well as implications for reducing fire risks and maintenance costs. No requirement was issued by HUD for federally subsidized housing, including public housing, to implement no-smoking policies.

The goal of establishing no-smoking policies in public housing authorities is to protect residents and employees from secondhand smoke exposure and to encourage people who smoke to quit. State and public housing authority resident surveys show that the majority of market renters and public housing residents – including both smokers and non-smokers – prefer to live in smoke-free housing.² An Oregon study published in 2011 documented the impact of implementing a smoke-free policy in multi-unit housing on smoking cessation behaviors, policy knowledge and compliance, and secondhand smoke exposure.³ According to the study, researchers observed an increase in quit rates from 2.6 percent to 14.7 percent after the implementation of the policy; self-reported indoor smoking decreased from 59 percent to 17 percent; and secondhand smoke exposure among non-smokers decreased from 41 percent to 17 percent.

Cultivating Multiple Partnerships

Foundation for Healthy Generations (Healthy Gen) was funded by the Department of Health in 2011 to lead efforts with public housing authorities to create changes in systems that improve the health of residents, including the creation of no-smoking policies. Healthy Gen, founded in 1974 as Comprehensive Health Education Foundation (CHEF), is a non-profit organization that works to create or expand intersections and relationships between people, communities, systems, research, and science.

- 1 U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Notice No. PIH-2012-25, Smoke-Free Policies in Public Housing (May 29, 2012); U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Notice PIH-2009-21 (HA) Non-smoking policies in public housing (July 17, 2009).
- 2 Washington State Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2010
- 3 Pizacani, B., Maher, J., Rohde, K., Drach, L., Stark, M. (2011). Implementation of a smoke-free policy in subsidized multiunit housing: Effects on smoking cessation and secondhand smoke exposure. *Nicotine and Tobacco Research*, V.14, N.9, 1027-1034.



As part of its Department of Health funded work, Healthy Gen acts as a catalyst for, and provides technical assistance to, public housing authorities and private landlords administering Section 8 vouchers to adopt no-smoking policies.⁴ Public Housing Authorities that already have partial no-smoking policies are also approached to determine their interest in expanding their policies to address 100 percent of their units and to ensure the comprehensiveness of policies. To help ensure sustainability and build community capacity, Healthy Gen also facilitates partnerships between local health departments and public housing authorities in the development of policies, including conducting resident surveys, participating in resident meetings, presenting to boards, and providing referrals to, and resources for, cessation. Healthy Gen's facilitation or strengthening of new or existing relationships between local health departments and public housing authorities helps to strengthen the base of support for no-smoking policies in multi-unit housing and to better align public housing and public health policy efforts.

Healthy Gen's partnerships with the PNRC-NAHRO and AWA have been, and continue to be, critical to the success of creating no-smoking policies in public housing. NAHRO is the leading national housing and community development advocate for the provision of adequate and affordable housing and viable communities for all United States residents - particularly those with low and moderate incomes. NAHRO also helps with professional development opportunities and effectiveness of its members. The PNRC, a non-profit entity, is one of eight regional organizations within NAHRO, and consists of over 80 housing and community development agencies and other organizations in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Alaska. AWA serves local housing authorities in the state and provides housing authorities with opportunities to network and share common problems and best practices.

The PNRC and AWA, both trusted messengers among public housing authorities and champions for no-smoking policies, bring to Healthy Gen and the Department of Health a critical understanding of the context and conditions in public housing authorities within which the adoption of no-smoking policies can occur. As trusted messengers, both organizations were critical to bridging the values of the public health and housing sectors, and reframing the public health message to effectively engage public housing authorities. The PNRC and AWA conduct outreach with public housing authorities to assess their interest in adopting a no-smoking policy. If an interest is expressed, the PNRC conducts a short assessment to determine readiness, assets, barriers, potential partners, and timelines. If a relationship does not exist between the housing authority and the local health department and is desired, Healthy Gen begins efforts to support its development. This is followed by the provision by PNRC and Healthy Gen of needed technical assistance to public housing residents, staff, and boards in the drafting of policy adoption materials. The PNRC and Healthy Gen also provide technical assistance in the form of presentations to housing commissioners, staff training/coaching, resident presentations, and support post-policy adoption.

The established relationships already in place between housing authorities and PNRC and Healthy Gen were key to successfully advancing no-smoking policies with public housing authorities in Washington. In some cases, due to the challenges inherent in working across sectors, previous efforts by a local health department were minimally successful, if not unsuccessful, in establishing a partnership with a public housing authority and effecting policy change. In at least one instance, efforts by the PNRC and Healthy Gen to encourage a relationship between the two entities were invaluable in cultivating a quality partnership between the local health department and the public housing authority.

⁴ Section 8 housing is a federally funded program that expands choices in properties for potential low-income residents. Public housing authorities provide a rental subsidy voucher directly to the renter which can be used in a privately owned, market-rate building meeting HUD requirements.



Working across sectors is challenging, and effecting institutional change is difficult. Each sector has its own language, culture, values, and priorities. In addition to having a trusted messenger, cross-sector work can be facilitated by having a “culture translator” to assist with neutral convening. Among the initial steps by Healthy Gen and the PNRC at the onset of this work was to build the knowledge base of both the state and local health departments to better understand the landscape and complexities of public housing, issues of interest to public housing authorities, and potential challenges (and solutions) to effecting policy change. This helped state and local health departments better communicate with public housing authorities the case for no-smoking policies, and their respective roles in supporting policy adoption. Likewise, public housing authorities were provided a venue to articulate any concerns about establishing no-smoking policies, fears about potential impact on residents who do not comply, competing priorities and challenges, and needed flexibility in how and when to approach the establishment of no-smoking policies. As an example, during the 2013-2014 project period, Public Housing Authorities were impacted by significant federal budget reductions leading to reduced staffing or difficulties in maintaining minimum staffing levels. This made efforts to promote no-smoking policies difficult despite the benefits of healthier environments and reduced maintenance costs.

RESULTS AND SUSTAINABILITY

As of 2014, 32 of the 38 Public Housing Authorities in the state have at least one or more properties covered by a no-smoking policy. This includes 34,174 of a total of 38,844 public housing units in Washington State. In 2009, only 4 public housing authorities, with a total of 834 units, had a no-smoking policy in place. The advancement of no-smoking policies currently impacts about 82,000 residents of public housing authorities throughout the state. Twenty-eight (28) of the 32 Public Housing Authorities with no-smoking policies cover 100 percent of their properties. At least 19 Public Housing Authority no-smoking policies are considered comprehensive.⁵

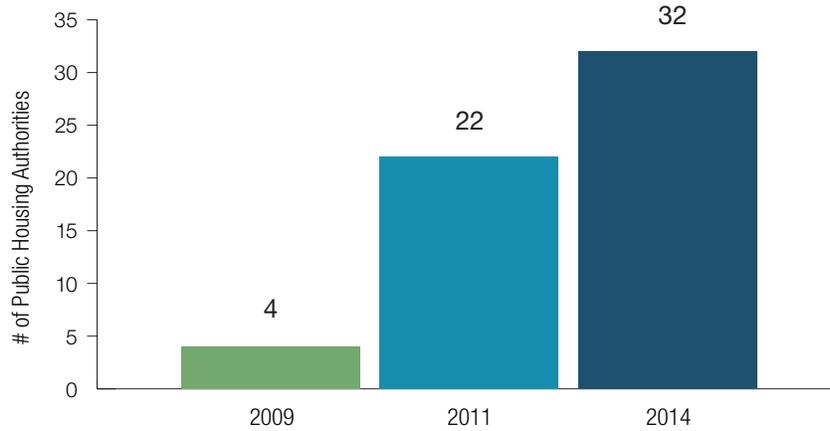
The Department of Health, Healthy Gen, PNRC, AWA, and local health departments are continuing efforts to support the adoption of no-smoking policies with the remaining Public Housing Authorities. Where there is an existing partnership between a Public Housing Authority and a local health department, technical assistance and support are offered by Healthy Gen and PNRC. For those public housing authorities with existing policies, technical assistance and guidance on topics such as enforcement and cessation continue to be provided by Healthy Gen and PNRC. Outreach and education efforts have also been extended to owners and managers of privately-owned units that are rented to Section 8 voucher participant households via public housing authority partners. There are approximately 46,000 low-income households in Washington receiving Section 8 housing subsidies.

Anecdotal reports from Public Housing Authorities that have implemented no-smoking policies point to successful compliance by the majority of residents, increased resident satisfaction, and decreases in property maintenance costs. According to Healthy Gen and PNRC, “No-smoking policies are slowly achieving the goal of a healthier, safer environment for tenants – a fundamental obligation of landlords – and increased sustainability of rental properties.”

⁵ Comprehensive no-smoking policies cover all indoor private and common areas (laundry facilities, community rooms, etc.) and all out-door private (balconies) and common areas (parking lots, walkways, etc.)

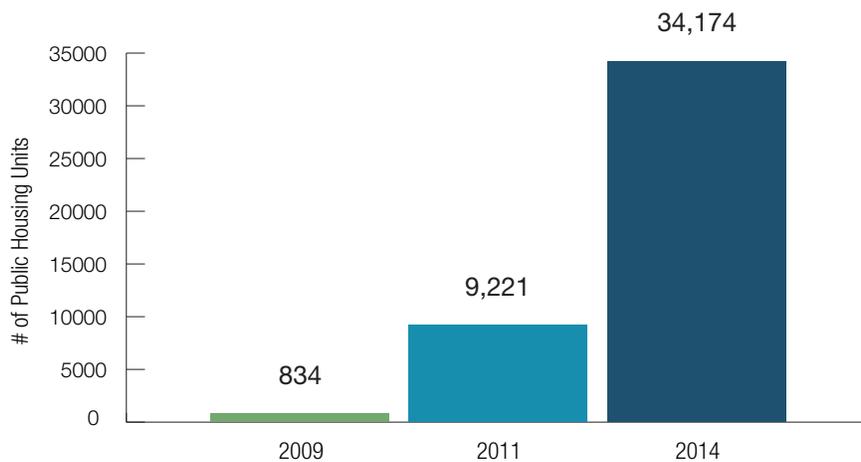


FIGURE 1: WA Public Housing Authorities (PHA) with No-Smoking Policies



As of March 2014, 32 of the 38 Public Housing Authorities in the state have at least one or more properties covered by a no-smoking policy.

FIGURE 2: WA PHA Units Covered by No-Smoking Policies



34,174 of a total of 38,844 public housing units in the state are covered by no-smoking policies.

