



Success Story

Promotores Make the Difference on Santa Maria Tobacco Control Policies

Success at a Glance

In Santa Maria, an agricultural center in northern Santa Barbara County, community health workers – or promotores – leveraged their role in the community to activate local Spanish-speaking community and harness their support for stronger tobacco control policies.

“Promotores are our eyes and ears in the field, and the eyes and ears for the Hispanic community.”

Juliza Ramirez, Health Educator
Associate, Santa Barbara County
Public Health

Approach

In July 2019, a task force assembled by the Santa Barbara County Public Health Department Tobacco Prevention Program (TPP) and the Coalition Engaged in a Smoke-free Environment (CEASE) began to assess community sentiment on strengthening tobacco control policies in the City of Santa Maria. Given that 76% of Santa Maria’s population is Hispanic or Latino, CEASE believed it critical to reach out to the community in Spanish, specifically by engaging the Santa Barbara County Promotores Network (SBCPN), which supports public health programs by educating and connecting Spanish-speaking communities to resources. Cultivating strong relationships with promotores provided important access to the Spanish and Mixteco-speaking communities, both by providing education sessions, recruiting community members to attend Council meetings, and sharing their own personal support for stronger tobacco control policies.

“Promotores are our eyes and ears in the field, and the eyes and ears for the Hispanic community,” said Juliza Ramirez, a native Spanish-speaker who was a health educator associate for Santa Barbara County Public Health at the time.

Keys to Success

1. Engage early. Engaging Santa Maria-area promotores, starting with the strategic planning process was crucial to incorporating the community’s voice. That was particularly important because TPP staff were essentially “outsiders,” based in more than an hour away in Santa Barbara.

“It was really important for us to include them in these discussions because the issues are affecting them first-hand,” said Shantal Hover-Jones, who was the program coordinator for TPP at the time.

In Santa Maria, promotores became members of the task force and attended CEASE meetings as part of the data collection process. Promotores also helped secure letters in support of stronger tobacco controls community members.

2. Build trust. TPP has a longstanding relationship with local promotores. This foundation was critical to building trust within the Spanish and Mixteco-speaking community. TPP focused on what the community felt it needed, rather than setting the agenda, was important to further develop trust,

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Ramirez said, “Ask ‘what are you seeing that needs to be addressed and how can we work together to make the retail environment a little safer and healthier for our kids?’ Developing a successful relationship with local promotores needs to start well before policy efforts begin. It starts now, even if you’re not working on any policies.”

3. Customized materials, training. TPP developed educational materials using culturally relevant examples. When describing the ways in which the tobacco industry targeted youth with flavored products, materials highlighted flavors popular with the Hispanic community, such as churro.

TPP provided 1:1 Spanish-language training sessions in Fall 2019 for promotores working on the issue of youth tobacco use. This training focused on providing information and building confidence as they prepared to offer public testimony.

“People need to feel heard and validated in their experiences and we were really able to bridge that gap,” Ramirez said. “It really empowered them to speak and share their stories.”

Maribel Landeros, and SBCPN Health Advocate and Lead Promotora for Mid & North County, said partnering to develop materials is paramount to effectively reaching the community.

The Success!

The policy success was Santa Maria City Council adopted a Tobacco Retail License (TRL), which includes the elimination of the sale of all flavored tobacco and vaping products, including menthol. Additionally, the TRL prohibits the sales of tobacco in pharmacies or in youth sensitive areas. The policy also sets minimum pack size and price for cigarettes, cigars and cigarillos, and limits density among tobacco retailers.

Personal stories were crucial as the campaign faced of intense retailer opposition. In addition to encouraging community members to get involved and share their stories, several promotores attended with their children and offered their own personal experiences. During presentations, promotores presented information but also brought tobacco paraphernalia for members to examine.

“By engaging promotores, our community showed up and truly reflected Santa Maria,” Hover-Jones said. “We got a lot more families and youth at the meeting and to speak and be there in support.”

An additional success was the leadership demonstrate by the promotores engaging in the Spanish-speaking community and their buy-in that this was a major community health issue. Landeros said, “personal testimony

“We don’t come in pretending to understand everything. We come in with the knowledge and perception that most of our community have, because we’re part of the community,” she said.

For Columba, who has worked with SBCPN for a decade, community education work on youth tobacco use hit home after she learned one of her children had tried flavored tobacco. The personal connection to the issue, bolstered with individualized training, spurred her to provide public testimony in support of the policy and encourage other community members to do the same.

“I had the information, but I didn’t know that I had to be more in-depth to be able to help,” she said. “I think that helps when you talk from the heart and want to make a change.”

4. Going beyond translation. “Simply translating materials isn’t enough”, Landeros said. “It doesn’t overcome other information gaps”. During presentations, promotores presented information but also brought tobacco paraphernalia for members to examine.

“Some had heard the word ‘vaping’ in English before, but they had no idea what that meant,” she said. “To me, the conversation is not ‘How can I convince you?’ but ‘What is the information you need to have to make the best decision for yourself.’”

had a powerful impact on the broader community. The community often lacks trust in institutions or can be skeptical of their ability to participate effectively. Seeing promotores, who are natural leaders in their social circles, share their stories and create change “empower(ed) the entire community to speak up,” she said.

For more information:

Santa Barbara County Promotores Network: <https://www.sbceo.org/domain/132>

Santa Barbara County Public Health Department Tobacco Prevention Program:
<https://www.countyofsb.org/phd/healthed/tobacco-prevention-home.sbc>