



Empowering Residents to Protect Fresno MUH Residents

Executive Summary

The Fresno County Tobacco Free Coalition is a network of diverse organizations and motivated community members dedicated to reducing tobacco use, secondhand smoke, and tobacco smoke residue exposure (known as thirdhand smoke). With the support of the Fresno County Department of Public Health Tobacco Prevention Program (TPP) and the Fresno Economic Opportunities Commission (EOC), the Coalition worked to empower residents around the issue of smokefree multi-unit housing (SFMUH). As a result of the Coalition's work, the Fresno City Council passed a smokefree multi-unit housing policy in October 2021, making Fresno the largest California city to adopt smokefree protections for MUH residents.

Background

This community-led campaign was not the coalition's first attempt to pass a SFMUH policy and historically, City Council had shown little support for tobacco prevention policies. The American Lung Association's State of Tobacco Control Report 2020, prior to this 2021 campaign, showed the city of Fresno earned an F grade for tobacco prevention policies, including SFMUH. This is vital because the City of Fresno has a high rate of renters - 53%, many of whom live below the poverty line. The region also has increased rates of infant mortality, preterm births, childhood asthma, and diabetes.

Fresno County Tobacco-Free Coalition:

Asian Pacific Islander Partners and Advocates Countering Tobacco (API PACT Program)

American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network

California Health Collaborative

Fresno County Superintendent of Schools

Fresno Economic Opportunities Commission

Jakara Movement

Out Against Big Tobacco

Regional Advocates Countering Tobacco (REACT)

Unidos Por Salud

Voices Inspiring Valley Action (VIVA)

Youth Leadership Institute (YLI)

Mobilizing Youth to Nix Tobacco (MYNT)

▶ Check out the Center's Resources at organizingtoendtobacco.org

"Using Stories to Win Your Campaign"

Purposefully Engage with the Community

Starting in Fall 2019, the Department of Public Health selected the Fresno EOC as a funded campaign partner. Using the Community Action Model (CAM), Fresno EOC's Tobacco Education Program—visited college classes and leveraged its contacts to recruit and trained eight (8) local residents interested in community organizing to become community advocates.

One of the community advocates' key activities was to conduct public opinion surveys with multi-unit housing (MUH) residents about their opinions of a potential smokefree MUH policy. They found that 91% of respondents – all of them MUH residents – supported smokefree housing and 66% had a family member with a health condition that was worsened by exposure to secondhand smoking, such as asthma or heart disease. In March of 2020, the coalition's work shifted to the online environment due to the COVID 19 pandemic, with surveys promoted on partner organizations' social media and conducted via an online platform. Once the coalition had data showing strong support for smokefree MUH protections, the Coalition created and implemented focus groups in each of the seven city council districts. These focus groups were held over virtually and included participation from residents from each district.

“The focus groups took a lot of time – more than we anticipated— but the community advocates were able to collect a lot of really good data,” said Leila Gholamrezaei, a Health Educator with the Fresno County Department of Public Health TPP. “One of the

things that we saw was that many apartment complexes already had their own [voluntary] smokefree policies in place, but the managers were not doing a good job implementing them.” The group also created a powerful set of key messages that were included in fliers, social media posts and educational packets. The Coalition tailored the educational packets for city council members based on the council member's personal history, interests, voting record, and results from the focus groups held with their constituents. “We did our homework on each council member,” said one community youth advocate who worked on the campaign. “I thought they wouldn't take us seriously because we were young. But we did so much [ground softening] for almost two years. We packaged it well.”

Develop and Implement a Campaign Action Plan

Based on the results of the surveys, the Coalition created a campaign action plan to educate community members, decision-makers, and organizational stakeholders. The comprehensive plan included completing a Midwest Academy Chart (MASC), which identified local non-profit organizations and the Housing Authority as key partners. Conducting community presentations, both virtually and in-person, proved very valuable. They were able to gather feedback directly from the community that led to some letters of support and endorsements. With powerful data and letters showing support, coalition members were ready to educate city council members and demonstrate their findings.

▶ Check out the Center's Resources at organizingtoendtobacco.org

"Conducting a Midwest Academy Strategy Chart" (MASC)

Activate Earned and Paid Media Campaigns

To help educate the broader public about the concerns with secondhand smoke exposure in MUH, the Fresno County Department of Public Health activated a paid media campaign plan that included TV ads, digital ads and billboards. Meanwhile, the coalition focused on educating the public with an “earned” or free media campaign. Community advocates participated in a radio interview, sent letters to the editor on the importance of SFMUH, and promoted their survey findings on social media. The Coalition’s social media campaign also highlighted residents’ personal stories of living with secondhand smoke to help others connect with the issue. In 2018, the Coalition organized a Fresno County Smokefree Multi-Unit Housing Summit for city officials, property managers, and owners who wanted to learn more about ways to reduce exposure to secondhand smoke in multi-unit housing. This event also generated media attention for their issue.



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The Power of Personal Stories

During outreach at community events and focus groups, the coalition identified individuals that could share their stories with the public and council members. They gathered stories that focused on the impacts of living with secondhand smoke, such as parents of children with asthma, seniors with breathing problems and others concerned about the far-reaching impacts of secondhand smoke.

The Coalition won the support of two council members, who began writing a draft policy. One council member described the stories as the tipping point that convinced him of the need for a citywide policy. The MUH policy was introduced in September 2021 and passed the following month.

Summary

As the first time attempting an SFMUH policy, the Coalition had much to celebrate. On October 14, 2021, the City of Fresno became the largest community in California to adopt a smokefree policy. The Coalition credits the success of the campaign to the passionate residents that joined the coalition to demonstrate strong support for a Smokefree MUH policy. Through their successful engagement, community members became passionate advocates that were prepared to share their opinions with data to amplify their voices. “It resonated more with the council that these young people from the community took the time to work on the issue. They were the ones who really carried the project,” said Martha Zarate, program coordinator for Fresno Economic Opportunities Commission Rural Tobacco Education Program. The community-led campaign resulted in a SFMUH policy that prohibited smoking tobacco, nicotine, cannabis, and e-cigarettes in multi-unit rental properties containing two or more rental units, indoor common areas, and within 20 feet of common areas including recreational areas, entryways, and air conditioning units. Utilizing the momentum of this big win, The Fresno County Tobacco Free Coalition is now working on implementing a tobacco retail license to further protect residents.



For more information about this coalition, go to:
<https://dontblowitfresno.com/coalition/o>