



Bilingual Campaign Engages Latino Community to Pass Smokefree MUH Policy in City of Riverside

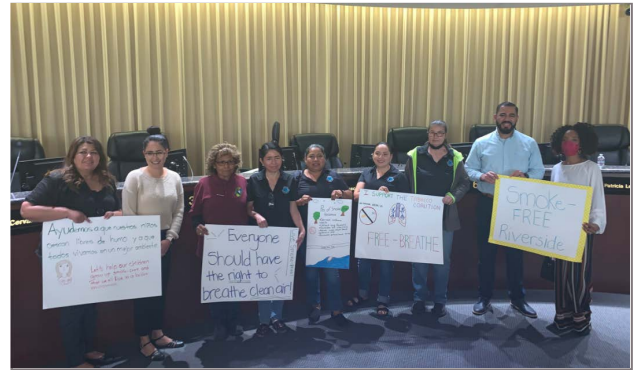
The Success

Community organizers engaged residents of Riverside, a Latino-majority city of 330,000, to create a bilingual multi-unit housing (MUH) campaign that resulted in the passage of a 2022 policy requiring all apartment complexes in Riverside to be smokefree. Beginning in 2018, the Riverside County Coalition for Tobacco Free Communities held community meetings in English and Spanish, trained residents to become community educators and followed up with a presence in the schools and neighborhood events. Although the policy excludes condominiums and townhomes, people who live in apartments in Riverside are now protected from secondhand smoke, a significant win for public health in the region.

The Approach

Building on existing relationships, the Riverside County Public Health Department approached a group of residents on the city's East Side, where many apartments are located, to gauge their interest in campaigning for smokefree Multi-Unit Housing (MUH). After a presentation about the need for smokefree protections, and obtaining buy-in from the group, community organizers began holding strategy meetings in English and Spanish. Approximately 53 percent of Riverside's residents are Latino, and a significant number do not speak English.

Residents were trained to conduct community surveys and presentations on the issue in English and Spanish. Presentations were conducted in each city council district with a significant number of presentations delivered at apartment complexes. Presentations were also conducted at parent-teacher association (PTA) meetings and local churches. A survey conducted with apartment managers revealed managers supported smokefree apartment complexes because of the reduced



fire risk and lower cost of renovation during tenant turnover. Surveys also showed that 80% of respondents favored policies in their apartment complex that would protect residents from secondhand smoke. The coalition used this compelling data in educational materials – disseminated in both English and Spanish—including flyers, brochures and informational packets disseminated to all members of the Riverside City Council.

The Coalition scheduled meetings with individual council members to share personal stories of how their families had been impacted by secondhand smoke in their MUH apartment buildings. “Our goal was to educate and empower residents to get out there and educate the community,” said Michelle Anguiano, program coordinator with Riverside University Health System’s Tobacco Control project. “It was about providing task force members with the tools necessary to fill their toolbox. When we talk about tools, [this includes] research, data and spokesperson[s] training so members felt confident delivering their message and concerns to elected officials”.

Thanks to intensive neighborhood outreach and education, a council member became a Champion for the issue. In 2021, the Council referred the MUH policy to the Safety, Wellness, and Youth Committee’s agenda. After unanimous approval, the issue quickly moved to the City Council.

The Coalition trained residents on public speaking and encouraged them to share their personal stories, including the impacts of secondhand smoke on children who suffered from asthma. In 2022, just prior to the council's vote, the Coalition collaborated with a local artist to hold an event where children were asked to design posters showing how secondhand smoke made them feel, which were then brought to city council meetings as a visual reminder of the campaign goal. The policy extending smokefree protections to all apartment units within the City of Riverside was approved in April 2022 and went into effect July 2022.

Key Takeaways

Make it easy for the community to get involved: Many of the residents involved in Riverside's campaign were parents juggling busy schedules. To help them participate, coalition leaders had to be flexible, which sometimes meant meetings were held in local parks or at a neighborhood school, so their kids could play while they met.

Keep the community engaged: Campaigns can take years and it's easy for volunteers to get discouraged. Remind Coalition members that it takes time to build momentum and soften the ground for new laws or regulations. Keep them engaged through ongoing events and updates so that they stay engaged.

Maintain a presence and visibility in the community: It takes time to build trust and these relationships could assist in future campaigns or to address emerging issues. Continue to build relationships, nurture connections, and assure residents you're there for the long haul, even after achieving policy objectives – for policy implementation. In this

campaign's case, Riverside University Health System, a medical center that provides healthcare and behavioral health services to the community, was already involved in the community, so the group was able to strengthen relationships and gain additional support for the cause.

Celebrate the wins: Although the Riverside Coalition was not able to extend smokefree protections to condominiums and townhouses, the Campaign was considered a huge win for thousands of apartment residents. Organizers made sure to celebrate the victory with photos, shares on social media and giving coalition members certificates and small trophies to underscore their sense of accomplishment.



For more information, go to:
<https://www.ruhealth.org/>

▶ Check out the Center's Resources at [organizingtoendtobacco.org](https://www.organizingtoendtobacco.org)

"How to Give Public Comment at City Council Meeting"

"Tips for Engaging & Retaining Coalition Members"

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