

Expanding Smokefree Communities

Community Profiles:

Wichita, Kansas

Community Overview

The American Lung Association of the Plains-Gulf Region (Kansas) in partnership with the Tobacco-Free Wichita Coalition is seeking to decrease secondhand smoke exposure and health disparities in Wichita, Kansas. Through this project, their goal is to protect residents by increasing the number of smokefree housing options in Wichita. They will assist 12 multi-unit housing complexes to voluntarily adopt smokefree indoor environments. This would impact the health of approximately 5,000 residents.

Community Demographics

Wichita is the largest city in Kansas. A regional center of business, healthcare and entertainment, Wichita has a population of 384,445.¹ It is located in south-central Kansas in Sedgwick County. The 2010 median income of households in Sedgwick County was \$45,726 in 2010. The unemployment rate is 10.5%, which increased by 75 percent from 2007 to 2010. The percentage of residents living in poverty according to national standard is 15.2 percent, which is higher than the state and national rates.² There are more uninsured individuals in Wichita than in other urban counties of the state. Home ownership is also lower in Wichita than across the U.S. (63.1% in Wichita vs. 69.4% in US), which means that many residents in Wichita are renting and living in multi-unit housing. In fact, more multi-unit housing complexes are more common in Wichita (24.8%) as compared to the U.S. (17.4%). There are 234 multi-unit housing complexes in Wichita, including 4 public housing authority complexes.³

In order to address Wichita's high smoking rate, members of Tobacco Free Wichita and the American Lung Association of the Plains-Gulf Region are working together to ensure the health security of residents by promoting smokefree multi-unit housing.

Burden of Tobacco Use – The Challenge

Low-Income Population Smoking Rates

Smoking rates tend to be higher among communities with lower socioeconomic status, and data indicates that this is true in Kansas overall and Wichita specifically. In 2009, current smoking among adults in Sedgwick County was greater among those with an annual household income less than \$35,000 (21.2%) than among those with an annual household income of \$35,000 or more (18.2%). Similarly, smoking rates were much higher among adults who had graduated high school or less (30.1%) compared to those with some college or a college degree (13.7%).⁴ Through this community partnership between Tobacco Free Wichita and the American Lung Association of the Plains-Gulf Region, there is a great opportunity to improve health equity and address the importance of protecting residents in multi-unit housing complexes from secondhand smoke.

As a result of the high instance of tobacco use, lung disease and lung cancer rates are higher than average in Wichita. The lung cancer age-adjusted death rate for Sedgwick County was 54.1 per 100,000 in 2006-2010, which is higher than the national rate but similar to Kansas' rate.⁵ Wichita's strong and growing community is experiencing lung health inequities that are affecting low-income residents. The

combination of a high smoking rate, a high rate of low-income residents, and a high rate of multi-unit housing renters has led to an increase in secondhand smoke exposure for individuals in Wichita. It is reported that only 12 of the 234 multi-unit housing developments in Wichita are smokefree, which does not allow most multi-unit housing residents options to breathe safe and healthy air at home. Secondhand smoke causes more than 41,000 deaths per year,⁶ and can migrate from other apartments and travel through doorways and ventilation systems. It can also cause or make worse many diseases, including lung cancer, respiratory infections and asthma. Ultimately, eliminating indoor smoking is one major way that low-income housing residents in Wichita can be protected from the harmful effects of tobacco smoke.

Developing and Promoting Smokefree Multi-Housing – The Opportunity

Smokefree housing translates to fewer vulnerable populations exposed to secondhand smoke, which means fewer individuals in communities experiencing lung disease as well as lower health care costs.

In the fall of 2012, the American Lung Association of the Plains-Gulf Region partnered with Tobacco Free Wichita to create the SmokeFree Multi-Unit Housing Initiative. They have recruited members of the local community to their Community Leadership team to gain input and guidance, and they have also conducted tenant assessments in two multi-unit housing complexes to determine their beliefs about smoke exposure in their homes. A project of this magnitude will enable Tobacco-Free Wichita and the American Lung Association of the Plains-Gulf Region to create community buy-in and develop community support throughout Wichita. It will allow both groups to initiate the implementation of smokefree housing and begin a city-wide trend.

The Tobacco-Free Wichita Leadership Team is comprised of high-level community leaders from multiple sectors who are committed to reducing tobacco-related health disparities among at-risk populations living in multi-unit housing exposed to deadly secondhand smoke. These members include representation from the following organizations.

- Sedgwick County Health Department
- American Lung Association in Kansas
- Wichita City Fire Department
- Wichita Public Housing Authority
- Kansas Department of Health and Environment
- Multi-Unit Housing tenants
- Insurance Companies

If you would like to find out more or get involved with the educational efforts underway in Wichita, Kansas, please contact Beth Marolf, Health Promotions Coordinator, at bmarolf@breathehealthy.org

¹ US Census Quick Facts: Wichita, Kansas, 2012: <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/20/2079000.html>.

² U.S. Bureau of the Census, [Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2010](#), Report P60, n. 238, p. 61.

³ U.S. Census QuickFacts: Wichita, Kansas, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/20/2079000.html>

⁴ Sedgwick County Health Department Data Book, 2009. Page 28.
<http://www.naccho.org/topics/infrastructure/accreditation/upload/Sedgwick-CHA-Part-1-Data-Book.pdf>

⁵ U.S. National Institutes of Health. National Cancer Institute: [State Cancer Profiles](#). Accessed February 5, 2014.

⁶ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. [The Health Consequences of Smoking—50 Years of Progress](#): A Report of the Surgeon General. 2014.