

Expanding Smokefree Communities

Community Profiles:

New Mexico

Community Overview

The American Lung Association of the Southwest (New Mexico) is collaborating with local Public Housing Authorities through their SmokeFree@Home initiative to ensure that over 8,000 residents living in multi-unit public housing complexes are protected from secondhand smoke exposure in their home.

Health Equity Focus

As many studies show, tobacco use disproportionately affects individuals from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Based on 2012 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) data, the overall adult smoking rate in New Mexico is 19.3 percent. However, smoking among adults who make under \$15,000 is more than twice as common (29.7%) as among those who make \$50,000 or more (12.7%).¹ The higher prevalence of smoking among low-income individuals has led to a common misperception that the low-income rental market, including public housing, is a population segment with a significant preference for apartments where smoking is permitted. In fact, most surveys show that many low-income residents prefer a nonsmoking environment.

Community Demographics

New Mexico is a state rich in multicultural history with a strong legacy and tradition in Hispanic, Indian and Anglo cultures. It comprises 121,356 square miles, with an estimated population of 2,085,538.² It is important to note that populations in New Mexico have a disproportionate percentage of individuals living below the poverty line. While Caucasians in New Mexico have a poverty rate of only 7 percent, rates of poverty among other races and ethnicities are much higher. In New Mexico, 19 percent of African American families, 20 percent of Hispanic/Latino families, and 25 percent of American Indian families are living below the poverty line. In certain counties, such as Dona Ana County (served by the Las Cruces Public Housing Authority), the poverty rate among Hispanic families is as high as 28 percent, while in McKinley County (served by the Gallup Housing Authority), 30 percent of American Indian families are living in poverty.³

Out of roughly two million residents, approximately 356,895 individuals live in multi-unit housing, with about 10,865 individuals residing in public assisted housing, including single family homes and multi-unit housing.⁴ There are 103 multi-unit public housing properties in New Mexico comprising a total population of about 8,500 individuals residing in 4,100 units. The target community is defined as residents living in multi-unit public housing (not tribal housing) that lacks a smokefree indoor environment. The targeted multi-unit public housing sites are distributed across the state within 20 counties and serve a population that primarily includes low-income families, and some elderly persons.

Burden of Tobacco Use – The Challenge

Low-Income Communities and Smoking Rates

Although health studies have not been conducted specifically on the public housing resident population in New Mexico; data from the 2012 BRFSS survey in New Mexico show that the self-reported prevalence of adult current asthma increases as income decreases, with the highest rates (11.8%) among those with the lowest income (less than \$15,000).⁵ These differences in asthma rates by income category match the patterns seen nationwide.⁶ Secondhand smoke can exacerbate asthma, along with causing deaths and disease among those exposed to it. In a 2013 survey, it was reported that roughly 25 percent, or one in four, multi-unit housing residents in New Mexico experience exposure to secondhand smoke within their residence on a regular basis.⁷ As a result, the dangers of secondhand smoke appear to be fairly well recognized in the tenant population, in that the majority of survey respondents agreed that even small amounts of daily exposure represents a serious health risk.

Meaningful Impact: Developing and Promoting Smokefree Multi-Housing Units

Creating smokefree public housing units will improve the health and safety of residents. In a survey done by the American Lung Association of the Southwest in New Mexico in 2013 separately from this project, individual household rules prohibiting indoor smoking were reported by 75 percent of tenant respondents overall.⁸ This value jumped to 86 percent among tenants with children under age 18 residing in the home. In July 2009, HUD issued NOTICE: PIH-2009-21 which strongly encouraged PHAs to implement non-smoking policies in some or all of their public housing units. According to the notice, PHAs are permitted and strongly encouraged to implement a non-smoking policy at their discretion, subject to state and local law.

Currently three public housing authorities in New Mexico have adopted voluntary smokefree policies: Santa Fe County, Santa Fe Civic, and Alamogordo. These three public housing authorities make up 20 percent of the public multi-unit housing in the state. The remaining 32 public housing authorities, which comprise the target community for this project, are geographically dispersed across the state, and cover a total of 88 public housing properties

In support of smokefree housing in New Mexico, a statewide geodatabase was developed containing location and attribute data on all multi-unit housing properties in the state, including public housing. This database will serve to monitor and guide smokefree efforts in the state in both public and private multi-unit housing, and also be used to support a website allowing tenants to identify smokefree rental housing in their area. Furthermore, the American Lung Association of the Southwest, through their SmokeFree@Home project activities, has fostered various collaborative relationships with various members including:

- University of New Mexico School of Medicine
- New Mexico Center for the Advancement of Research Engagement and Science on Health Disparities
- New Mexico Veterans' Affairs Health Care Services
- National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO), New Mexico Chapter
- New Mexico Department of Health
- Bernalillo County's Office of Health and Social Services
- Southern Area Health Education Center (SoHEC)

- New Mexico Department of Health, Tobacco Use Prevention and Control Division.
- New Mexico Public Health Association
- Bernalillo County Office of Environmental Health
- New Mexico Council on Asthma
- Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in New Mexico

If you would like to find out more or get involved with the educational efforts underway in New Mexico, please contact Erin Engelbrecht, Program Manager, at eenlebrecht@lungnewmexico.org.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. [Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey Prevalence Report 1997-2012](#).

² US Census Quick Facts: New Mexico, 2012: <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/35000.html>

³ Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Kids Count Data Center*, Families with Income Below Poverty by Race/Ethnicity 2007-2009: <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/bystate/Rankings.aspx?state=NM&ind=5568>

⁴ Calculations based on US Census Quick Facts: New Mexico 2011

⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. [Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey Prevalence Report 1997-2012](#).

⁶ American Lung Association: *Lung Disease in Diverse Communities 2010*
http://www.lung.org/assets/documents/publications/lungdisease- data/solddc_2010.pdf

⁷ American Lung Association in New Mexico: *Smoking Practices, Policies, & Preferences in New Mexico Rental Housing, 2013*.

⁸ American Lung Association in New Mexico: *Smoking Practices, Policies, & Preferences in New Mexico Rental Housing, 2013*.