

# Smoking bans in public housing could save dollars, lives

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Tobacco-free policies might save \$521 million a year, cut secondhand smoke exposure.

(HealthDay)—Smoking bans in subsidized housing, including public housing and rental assistance programs, would save \$521 million a year, according to new U.S. government research.

The authors of the study, from the U.S. [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC), estimated that cuts in health care costs related to secondhand smoke would account for the bulk of the savings, or \$341 million annually. They pointed out that smoke-free policies are particularly important in multi-unit housing, where exposure to secondhand smoke can be particularly harmful.

"Many of the more than 7 million Americans living in subsidized housing in the United States are children, the elderly or disabled," Dr. Tim McAfee, director of the CDC's Office on Smoking and Health, said in a CDC news release. "These are people who are most sensitive to being exposed to secondhand smoke. This report shows that there are substantial financial benefits to implementing smoke-free policies, in addition to the [health benefits](#) those policies bring."

The national president and CEO of the American Lung Association, Harold Wimmer, endorsed the

report.

"This study confirms that a smoke-free policy in all subsidized housing, in conjunction with comprehensive quit-smoking health benefits, would drastically improve public health and save the nation millions of dollars in the process," Wimmer said in an American Lung Association statement.

"Evidence shows that residents of multi-family housing are exposed to secondhand smoke even if they live in a unit where no one smokes," Wimmer added. "Nearly 63 million of the 79 million Americans who live in multi-family housing do not allow smoking in their homes, but approximately 28 million of them reported that secondhand smoke still infiltrated their homes, according to a recent study published in the journal *Nicotine and Tobacco Research*," he said.

Approximately 50,000 people in the United States die each year from exposure to secondhand smoke. A 2006 report from the Surgeon General warned there is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke and concluded that the only way to protect people from the harmful effects of secondhand smoke is to implement 100 percent smoke-free indoor policies.

For [public housing](#) alone, the CDC estimated the total annual savings associated with smoke-free policies would be roughly \$154 million a year. Of that amount, \$101 million would come from reduction in health care costs linked to secondhand smoke, \$32 million from renovations, and \$21 million from fire damage related to smoking.

The study authors said exposure to secondhand smoke can be particularly dangerous for people living in multi-unit housing.

"Secondhand smoke enters nearby apartments from common areas and apartments where smoking is occurring," study lead author, Brian

King, an epidemiologist with CDC's Office on Smoking and Health, explained in the CDC news release.

"Opening windows and installing ventilation systems will not fully eliminate exposure to secondhand smoke. Implementing smoke-free policies in all areas is the most effective way to fully protect all residents, visitors, and employees from the harmful effects of secondhand smoke," King said.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has urged public housing authorities as well as the owners and managers of multi-family housing rental assistance programs to prohibit smoking in their properties. To date, however, only a small percentage of public housing authorities have implemented such bans.

Back in January, the American Lung Association, American Academy of Pediatrics and 17 other medical and public health organizations requested that HUD adopt a smoke-free policy covering all multi-family housing under its control, according to Wimmer.

Sandra Henriquez, HUD's Assistant Secretary for Public and Indian Housing, noted that "this new study reinforces the importance of the Housing and Urban Development initiative to promote the adoption of smoke-free housing policies in public housing and other federally assisted multi-family housing."

She said in the news release: "We have seen considerable momentum in the number of public housing agencies across the country adopting this policy, which saves health and housing costs, in places like Boston, San Antonio, Seattle, and all public housing in the state of Maine."

Informing both residents and the owners and operators of subsidized housing on the health and financial benefits of smoke-free policies could protect more people from the negative effects of [secondhand smoke](#), according to the [CDC](#). The researchers added that providing the people living in subsidized housing with information and resources on quitting smoking could also help.

**More information:** The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provides more information on [smoking and tobacco use](#).

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