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**Fresno Economic Opportunities Commission**

**Rural Tobacco Education Program**

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Smoke-Free Multi-Unit Housing

Key Informant Interview Evaluation Report (1-E-6)

**Smoke-Free Multi-Unit Housing Complexes**

**Key Informant Interviews (1-E-6)**

AIM AND OUTCOME

The Fresno County Economic Opportunities Commission, Rural Tobacco Education Program (RTEP), sought to reduce exposure to secondhand smoke (SHS) and third-hand smoke (THS) in multi-unit housing (MUH) complexes. The program set the following objective to accomplish this goal:

*By June 30, 2025, two cities in rural Fresno County (e.g., Kerman and Mendota) will adopt and implement a policy that will prohibit smoking in 100% of individual units (including balconies and patios) in multi-unit housing complexes, making them entirely smoke-free units; and will require rental vacancy listings to include a category for smoking and non-smoking units.*

To date, only one city in rural Fresno County has adopted a MUH policy that prohibits smoking in 100% of individual units (including balconies and patios), making them entirely smoke-free units. In addition, no policies have been adopted requiring managers, affordable housing providers, and owners to disclose the location of smoking and non-smoking units or the smoking history of a unit to prospective tenants. Also, no policies have been adopted that require rental vacancy listing to include a category for smoking and non-smoking units.

BACKGROUND

Smoking is the single greatest avoidable cause of disease and death in the United States. Furthermore, SHS exposure has been shown to cause illness and premature death in children and adults who do not smoke. Exposure of adults to SHS can have immediate adverse effects and cause coronary heart disease and lung cancer. The U.S. Surgeon General has concluded that there is no risk-free level of exposure to SHS.1

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)2 found that one in four nonsmokers is exposed (SHS). Furthermore, one in three nonsmokers who live in rental housing are exposed to SHS. Many MUH residents are children, the elderly, and people with disabilities. Unfortunately, there remains a significant need to address exposure to SHS in MUH complexes.

As of January 1, 2023, 79 municipalities in California have passed strong MUH housing laws. According to the American Nonsmokers' Rights,3 these municipal laws prohibit smoking in 100% of private units of all specified types of MUH. Survey results from the California Adult Tobacco Survey4 revealed that 77.0% of Californians agreed that apartment complexes should require half of their rental units to be smoke-free. Furthermore, 85.3% of Californians agreed that smoking should not be permitted in common outdoor areas in apartment/condominium complexes, such as pools, common area patios, and walkways.

Multi-unit housing (MUH) is a significant residential option for many individuals and families in Fresno County. In 2010-2014, an estimated 25.0% of housing units were MUH in Fresno County. Also, the median household income in Fresno County was $45,201 per year and limited homeownership's affordability for many residents.5

The Fresno County Housing Authority oversees programs for over 14,000 families through some low-income options, including conventional low-rent, section 8 existing, section new construction, section 8 moderate rehabilitation, Section 8 voucher, migrant, farm labor, and emergency housing. Housing quality standards stipulate "the dwelling must be free of pollutants in the air at levels that threaten the health of the occupants." Federal regulations cite "dangerous levels of air pollution" as carbon monoxide, sewer gas, fuel gas, dust, and other harmful pollutants.6 However, SHS and THS exposure are not explicitly addressed as interior air quality pollutants.

In February 2019, the City of Firebaugh adopted a 100% smoke-free MUH complex policy. However, SHS in multi-unit and public housing continues to be a problem in rural Fresno County. Many families, children, and elderly residents in MUH and public housing experience increased respiratory issues, including asthma and emphysema. Senior housing residents encounter additional difficulties, including smoke detectors going off, being seriously ill, and exposure to tobacco smoke in their housing unit. This situation has led to many complaints from residents living in MUH in rural Fresno County communities, indicating a problem of exposure to SHS in MUH.

***EVALUATION METHODS AND DESIGN***

The goal of the key informant process evaluation activity was to target a mix of policymakers, including city council members, MUH owners/managers, and tenants. The key informant instrument focused on topics to determine support for the policy and ways to increase support to move the initiative. A convenience sample of tenants and owner/managers was used to assess support for the MUH policy. A total of five participants were identified and participated in the interviews. The participants included five MUH managers. Unfortunately, after several attempts to reach out to Kerman and Mendota city council members, no interviews were conducted with policymakers in the second wave.

The Program Evaluation Consultant contacted the Tobacco Control Evaluation Center (TCEC) regarding existing key informant interview surveys that would be appropriate for the target audience. The final instrument was developed by the Program Evaluation Consultant to address the needs of the program objectives. The final survey instrument gathered data from the participants including 1) owner/managers’ experiences with smoking issues, 2) perceived advantages or benefits to smoke-free MUH policies, and 3) perceived disadvantages or challenges to a 100% smoke-free policy. A copy of the final instrument is available in Appendix A.

Content analysis of open-ended responses was used to identify the support for the issue, as well as a champion for the issue. Also, the analysis was used to address challenges and barriers to the adoption of a smoke-free MUH policy.

**Limitations**

The primary limitations to this design were: 1) the lack of a comparison group to assess the intervention’s effect, and 2) the use of a convenience sample of the key informants may not represent the views of the broader policymakers in rural Fresno County communities.

RESULTS

**Participants.** A total of five participants MUH owners/managers participated in the key informant interviews. Four of the participants were from the City of Mendota and one from the City of Kerman.

**MUH Manager Experiences.** The MUH managers ranged in their level of experience. Three of the participants had at least 10 years of experience and one had less than a year. The participants managed a range of MUH complexes, from 44 units to 124 units. All participants were aware of tenants who smoked in their MUH complexes. Four of the participants reported that they had to remediate an apartment unit after a smoker had left the MUH complex. Those managers all agreed that remediation of a unit was expensive, with an estimate of $5,000.

**City Council Members.** In the first wave, the city council members were both newly elected and had been in their positions for less than one year. In comparison, the city manager indicated that he had been in his position for five years and as a city employee for over 10 years. Several attempts were made to interview city council members from Kerman and Mendota. Unfortunately, no interviews were conducted with policymakers in the second wave.

**MUH Policy Benefits and Challenges.** All of the participants were aware that SHS caused breathing difficulties and/or illnesses. Figure 1 shows, the benefits and challenges. The managers acknowledged the policy's benefits and did not see any challenges. In the first wave report, Policymakers identified reduced exposure to SHS and improved health as benefits of the policy. However, they raised concerns about the enforcement of the policy. In this second-wave report, policymakers' benefits and challenges were not analyzed.

**Figure 1.** Participants' perceived benefits and challenges

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The objective of the key informant interviews was to assess the process of adopting a 100% smoke-free MUH policy in rural Fresno County communities. The key informant instrument focused on the benefits and challenges/barriers to the adoption process. The interview instrument gathered data from the participants including 1) owner/managers’ experiences with smoking issues, 2) perceived advantages or benefits of smoke-free MUH policies, and 3) perceived disadvantages or challenges to a 100% smoke-free policy.

Overall, the participants agreed there were benefits to a 100% smoke-free MUH policy, including cleaner units, improved health, and reduced SHS exposure. However, the policymaker participants identified enforcement as a challenge/barrier to policy adoption.

Based on the key informant interview results, the RTEP plans to use this information to tailor their educational presentations to policymakers and address concerns about the adoption of the 100% smoke-free MUH policy and requiring rental vacancy listings to include a category for smoking and non-smoking units. One of these individuals could potentially champion the 100% smoke-free MUH policy with local city council members. These results will be disseminated to policymakers, MUH owners/managers, and community partners.

***References***

1U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *The Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke: A Report of the Surgeon General.* Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Coordinating Center for Health Promotion, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office of Smoking and Health, 2006.

2Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Secondhand Smoke: An Unequal Danger. *Vitalsigns*, February 2015. https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/pdf/2015-02-vitalsigns.pdf

3Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights. https://center4tobaccopolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Matrix-of-Strong-Local-Smokefree-MUH-Feb-2019.pdf

4California Adult Tobacco Survey. (2007). Prepared by: California Department of Public Health, California Tobacco Control Program, March 2008.

5U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 – 2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF

6<http://www2.hafresno.org/files/Housing_Quality_Standards_2004512-112913_.pdf>

**Appendix A**

Key Informant Interview Instrument

Fresno County Economic Opportunities Commission

Rural Tobacco Prevention Program

Smoke-Free Multi-Unit Housing

**Key Opinion Leader Interview (2-E-2)**

Date and Time of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Key Opinion Leader Interviewed: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Key Opinion Leader Position: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Multi-Unit Tenant Associations, Housing Owners, Managers:**

1. How long have you managed/operated housing complexes?
2. How many apartment/housing units do you currently manage?
3. How many (or percentage) of your tenants would you estimate are families with children?
4. Are you aware of any tenant(s) who smoke residing your apartment/housing units?

5. Have they ever had to clean/remediate an apartment unit after a smoker has left the unit?

About how much work had to be done and what was the cost?]

**Developers and City Council Members:**

1. How long have you been in your current position/business operation?
2. What is the impact of multi-unit housing on your [position/business]?

**All Key Informant Interviewees:**

1. In your opinion, what types of breathing difficulties and/or illnesses do you think can be caused by being around someone who smokes?
2. Are you aware that Second-hand Smoke is now identified as a “toxic air contaminant”?
3. In your opinion, what are the benefits of having a smoke-free policy [ordinance] to prohibit smoking in 100% of individual units (including balconies and patios) in multi-unit housing complexes?
4. What drawbacks do you think there would be for having a smoke-free policy [ordinance] to prohibit smoking in 100% of individual units (including balconies and patios) in multi-unit housing complexes?
5. What do you think will be the challenges/barriers would possibly be faced in the adoption of a smoke-free policy [ordinance] to prohibit smoking in 100% of individual units (including balconies and patios) in multi-unit housing complexes?

Your time and opinions have been very valuable to us! Thank you.

Do you have any suggestions that you would like the Fresno EOC Rural Tobacco Education Program to consider as it continues its work in multi-unit housing?

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