

TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

FROM: Christopher Mackie, Medical Officer of Health

DATE: 2015 February 19

REDUCING SECOND-HAND SMOKE EXPOSURE IN MULTI-UNIT HOUSING

Recommendations

It is recommended:

- 1) *That the Board of Health receive Report No. 013-15 re Reducing Second-Hand Smoke Exposure in Multi-Unit Housing; and further*
- 2) *That the Board of Health endorse the actions and priorities outlined in the Smoke-Free Housing Ontario Coalition letter “Act now to reduce the impact of second-hand smoke exposure in multi-unit housing in Ontario,” attached as [Appendix A](#), communicating its support for the Smoke-Free Housing Ontario Coalition.*

Key Points

- There is no safe level of second-hand smoke exposure.
- There is increasing public support for smoke-free housing in the province of Ontario and in Middlesex-London.
- Residents in low-income housing and those residents seeking market-value multi-unit housing often do not have the ability to select housing that is free from exposure to second-hand smoke.
- Participation in the Smoke-Free Housing Ontario Coalition will enable Health Unit staff to engage in dialogue with provincial, regional and local housing and community health stakeholders to explore options on how to increase the availability smoke-free, safe and affordable housing.

Background

The *Smoke-Free Ontario Act (SFOA)*, enacted in May 2006, protects residents of Ontario from exposure to [second-hand smoke \(SHS\)](#) by prohibiting smoking in enclosed public places and workplaces, hospital entrances, and the common areas of multi-unit housing (lobbies, elevators, stairwells, covered parking garages and hallways). However, the *SFOA* does not prohibit smoking in private units, on balconies, or around the entrances to buildings. As a result, second-hand smoke exposure and drifting second-hand smoke between and into individual units continues to be an issue for those living in multi-unit housing (apartment buildings, condominiums, town-houses, and semi-detached houses).

Individuals spend most of their time at home, and it is in this environment where exposure continues to be reported. In Ontario, approximately one third of those living in multi-unit housing reported regular exposure to second-hand smoke. No matter how well built or maintained a building may be, second-hand smoke can travel from one unit to another. Second-hand smoke can seep through shared walls, ventilation systems, doors, windows, shared balconies, electrical outlets and through gaps in plumbing. As a result, many are forced to breathe in the smoke from their neighbours and often the only solution to reduce exposure to drifting second-hand smoke is to move; however, moving is not always an option. This is especially true for the differently-abled, older adults and those with limited income. And for those that do have a choice of where to live and the means to move, smoke-free housing may not be an option due to the lack of availability in Middlesex-London.

There is no safe level of exposure to second-hand smoke. While second-hand smoke exposure can cause a range of adverse health effects for anyone, it can be especially harmful to children, the elderly, for those who suffer from chronic health problems and those who are pregnant. Therefore, further reducing exposure to second-hand smoke in multi-unit housing is crucial to protecting those most at risk.

Support for Smoke-Free Multi-Unit Housing

A strong majority of Ontarians and residents of Middlesex-London support the creation of smoke-free multi-unit housing. According to rapid risk factor surveillance system (RRFSS) data collected from January 2011 to April 2012, two thirds of Middlesex-London residents supported banning smoking inside multi-unit dwellings, with former smokers and never smokers more likely to support such restrictions. The results from the locally gathered data is presented in Appendix B [Public Support for Banning Smoking in Multi-Unit Dwellings - Infographic](#) and Appendix C [Public Support for Banning Smoking in Multi-Unit Dwellings - Health Index, June 2014](#). This level of support is consistent with data collected in [2011 by Ipsos Reid](#), indicating that 67% of Ontarians agreed that all multi-unit housing in Ontario should be 100% smoke-free.

Across the province, housing providers, including some local development groups have begun to take action designating market-value multi-unit housing buildings as 100% smoke-free to further enhance protection from second-hand smoke exposure. As of November 2014, more than [100 housing providers](#) have adopted smoke-free policies. In addition, several municipalities have enacted smoke-free policies in 100% of their social housing buildings including the City of Ottawa, the Region of Waterloo, the County of Northumberland, the District of Timiskaming, Grey-Bruce and Owen Sound, and Cochrane District Social Services. The availability of smoke-free multi-unit housing within Middlesex-London requires consideration and is part of the dialogue that is occurring with housing and community health stakeholders around the availability of safe and affordable housing. Endorsement of the Smoke-Free Housing Ontario Coalition actions and policies by the Board of Health supports Health Unit staff to engage and consult with provincial, regional and local housing and community health stakeholders to explore options on how best to increase the availability of smoke-free, safe and affordable housing.

Commitment to Smoke-Free Housing in Middlesex-London

The majority of those living in multi-unit housing want to live in a smoke-free building; however, the availability of smoke-free, safe and affordable housing options is a challenge within Middlesex-London. Offering smoke-free buildings, both in the non-profit and market value housing sectors has advantages for all stakeholders and would contribute to a healthier community. Endorsement of the Coalition's actions and policies outlined on [Appendix A](#) aligns with evidence-informed practice, but enables the Health Unit to engage with local and regional stakeholders to explore future potential options to increase the availability of smoke-free, safe and affordable housing.

This report was prepared by Ms. Sarah Neil, Public Health Nurse, Ms. Donna Kosmack, SWTCAN Manager, and Ms. Linda Stobo, Manager, Chronic Disease Prevention and Tobacco Control Team.



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This report addresses the following requirement(s) of the Ontario Public Health Standards:
Foundations: Principles 1, 2; Comprehensive Tobacco Control: 1, 6, 7, and 9