

MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of Health Members, Dr. Ian Gemmill, MOH

FROM: Susan Stewart, Director, CDIP
Dave McWilliam, Manager -Tobacco Prevention Team, CDIP
Gillian Pritchard, Health Promoter, Tobacco Prevention Team
Sandy Fraser, Tobacco Enforcement Officer, Tobacco Prevention Team

DATE: 2014-05-28

SUBJECT: Smoke-Free Multi-Unit Dwellings (MUDs)

Issue:

Many advances have been made in tobacco control over the years; however, involuntary exposure to second-hand smoke continues to be an issue for people living in multi-unit dwellings (MUDs). There is no safe level of exposure to second-hand smoke.¹ As a result of this information, many changes have occurred in tobacco control to reduce people's exposure to other people's smoke. Enclosed public places and workplaces, such as malls, bars, restaurants and recreation facilities, are now smoke-free. In many Ontario municipalities, including Kingston, smoke-free areas also include outdoor places, such as restaurant patios, parks, playgrounds, beaches and building entrances and exits.² As a result of these policies, involuntary exposure to second-hand smoke has reduced significantly. Homes are now the place that most people report being exposed to second-hand smoke.³ In 2010, over 1.3 million non-smoking Canadians reported being exposed to second-hand smoke in their homes.³

Almost one-third of Ontarians live in multi-unit dwellings (townhomes, apartment buildings, semi-detached houses, condominiums, etc.) and are twice as likely to be exposed to second-hand smoke in the home than people who live in single detached houses.⁴ The *Smoke Free Ontario Act, 2006* prohibits smoking in the common areas of MUDs; however, people are still allowed to smoke in their individual units. Second-hand smoke drifts into other units, causing involuntary exposure; no amount of ventilation or crack sealing can prevent this incursion. While people who live in MUDs may expect some level of nuisance from their neighbours, such as noise or cooking odours, second-hand smoke is more than just a nuisance: it is a health hazard. Second-hand smoke is an environmental carcinogen that can lead to many chronic diseases, such as lung cancer and heart disease.^{1,5} Children are at an even higher risk from second-hand smoke because they have quicker breathing rates than adults and less developed bodily systems.^{6,7}

Making MUDs smoke-free makes good business sense. It is two to three times more expensive to turnover a smoking unit than a non-smoking unit, owing to increased cleaning, painting and replacement costs.⁸ Smoke-free policies can also reduce insurance premiums for landlords and tenants alike.⁹ There is also a market for smoke-free housing in Ontario; recent research suggests that smoke-free apartment buildings have an increased re-sale value⁸, and that many people would prefer smoke-free housing.¹⁰ Overall there is a growing business case for taking MUDs smoke-free.

Some MUDS currently have smoke-free policies that prohibit smoking in all indoor areas, including individual units. Some property managers choose to prohibit smoking in outdoor areas as well. Smoke-free policies are legal, enforceable and non-discriminatory. It is important to note that these policies do not prohibit smokers from living in a smoke-free building. Nor do they force tenants to quit smoking or evict current tenants who smoke. In Ontario, existing tenants must be grandfathered, meaning that they will be allowed to smoke in their units as long as they live there.¹¹ Only tenants who sign their lease after the no-smoking policy goes into effect will not be allowed to smoke in their units. The length of time it takes before the building is 100% smoke-free depends on individual unit turnover.

The good news is that there is momentum gaining in Ontario around smoke-free housing. In 2010, the Tobacco Strategy Advisory Group, a provincial committee of experts and leading tobacco control researchers, recommended that Ontario continue and intensify voluntary approaches to smoke-free MUDs.¹² Over 90 non-profit housing providers in Ontario to date have designated their buildings as smoke-free, for a total of over 14,000 units.¹³ Many cities near the KFL&A region, including Ottawa, Brockville, Gananoque and Belleville, are among those that provide smoke-free choices for people living in social housing.¹³ Some private housing providers are also starting to realize the benefits of designating their properties as smoke free. In Peterborough, 15 smoke-free housing policies have been developed in the region to date.¹⁴ After the implementation of smoke-free policies, landlords are finding them either a neutral or a positive experience. A recent survey of tenants in a 100% smoke-free building run by Centretown Citizens Ottawa Corporation found that 98% of tenants support their policy.¹⁵

In the KFL&A area, 83% of the population does not smoke;¹³ however, there are only a few smoke-free MUDs options available. The vast majority of smoke-free MUDs in the KFL&A area are in the for-profit housing market, with limited availability in the not-for-profit market. In Kingston and the County of Frontenac, there are 19,445 rental units; however, there are only 13 property managers that are listed on the KFL&A Public Health 'Smoke Free Housing Registry'.^{17, 18} This lack of smoke-free options gives people little choice but to live in MUDs where they and their children risk being exposed to second-hand smoke.

Recommendation:

THAT the Board of Health recommend to social housing boards in the KFL&A area to offer a smoke-free housing option within their existing and new facilities.

THAT the Board of Health recommend to private property owners and operators to provide smoke-free multi-unit dwellings and promote their existence.

FURTHER THAT the Board of Health encourage the Ministry of Housing to develop policy and programs to facilitate the provision of smoke-free housing, and send correspondence to the:

- 1) Honourable Bill Mauro, Provincial Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing**
- 2) Honourable Deb Matthews, Provincial Minister of Health and Long-term Care**
- 3) Honourable Kathleen Wynne, Premier of Ontario**

AND FURTHER THAT a copy of this resolution be forwarded to all municipalities in the KFL&A area, to the Non-Smokers' Rights Association and to the Ontario Campaign for Action on Tobacco.

References

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