

August 19, 2011

County of Simcoe
Human Services Committee
1110 Highway 26
Midhurst, Ontario L0L 1X0

Dear Committee Chair:

RE: Smoking in Public Housing Buildings

I am making this submission in my capacity as the medical officer of health for the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit to support and encourage the creation of a policy that will provide smoke-free housing options for tenants living in County of Simcoe multi-unit dwellings.

Reducing the preventable death and diseases associated with tobacco use including second-hand smoke is a public health priority. Health Canada has advised that there is no safe level of exposure to second-hand smoke. It causes cancers, respiratory illness and heart disease and kills more than 800 non-smokers in this country each year. Providing smoke-free home environments is one of the best ways to protect people from second-hand smoke exposure.

As you are aware, more than 400,000 Ontario residents live in non-profit housing, and many of these tenants belong to groups with higher risks associated with exposure to second-hand smoke – the elderly, children, or the socially disadvantaged. If their social housing provider does not offer smoke-free units they have no choice but to continue exposing themselves and their families to this health hazard.

A growing number of social housing providers across the province and Canada are making smoke-free living an option for tenants. Some of these groups are identified in the attached submission that I have prepared for the committee's review. In it I have included compelling evidence to support the development of a smoke-free housing policy to support your residents who want to protect themselves and their families from the health hazard associated with drifting second-hand smoke.

The health unit would be pleased to work with you to develop and implement a smoke-free housing policy that will protect the health of your tenants.

Sincerely,

Charles Gardner, MD, CCFP, MHSc, FRCPC
Medical Officer of Health

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Att (1)