

Smokefree Multi-Unit Housing: Advice on Incentives

Smokefree housing has multiple benefits for housing providers and residents, but sometimes motivation is needed to encourage people along the path towards smokefree housing. This fact sheet contains advice generated from the experiences of smokefree housing advocates around the country. It provides advice for people who are working to increase the availability of smokefree housing about incentives that can encourage and support housing providers who are considering making their building(s) smokefree, as well as advice for housing providers on incentives to help their residents comply with a new smokefree policy.

Incentives for housing providers to adopt a smokefree policy:

Signage

Many smokefree housing programs, whether operated by a coalition/health department/organization, offer free or reduced price signage for smokefree properties. Providing several choices of signs (window clings, plastic indoor signs, metal outdoor signs) allows property owners and managers to select what is most suitable for their properties. Be sure to require a copy of the smokefree policy in exchange for the signs.

Property listing

List smokefree properties (and vacancies if you have the capacity) on the smokefree housing page of your coalition/health department/organization website. This provides free advertising of smokefree buildings to people who are seeking smokefree housing, and creates a strong incentive for property owners and managers to engage with you. Be sure to require a copy of the smokefree policy in order to verify the policy and track progress in your community.

One housing program provides an incentive for property owners and managers to list vacancies by sending a gift certificate and letter of appreciation to every new owner who has listed a smokefree property with them in the previous six months.

Advertising

One program offered property owners and managers a \$50 stipend towards an advertisement to promote that their property is smokefree. The stipend could go towards a classified ad in a local newspaper (print or online), an ad on a regional rental finder website, or other types of area publications.

Advice

Let property owners and managers know that they can contact your smokefree housing program for free advice, trainings, and educational resources. Knowing that support is available can motivate a housing provider during their process of considering, adopting, implementing, and sustaining a smokefree policy.

Cost Savings

Educating housing providers about the cost saving and financial benefits that can result from having a smokefree building can be very influential, and serves as a sustainable incentive for choosing to implement a smokefree policy.

Incentives for residents to comply with a smokefree policy:

Positive Messages

“Our building is going smokefree to have a healthier, cleaner, and safer living environment for all of our residents.” Having a positive message about why the housing provider is adopting and implementing a smokefree policy for the building can help residents understand and accept the new policy, which in turn can help increase compliance down the road.

Resident Meetings

Housing providers should educate and engage residents early on in the process about why the policy is being adopted and what it means for residents. Hold resident meetings and post information highlighting the benefits of having a smokefree building—reduce secondhand smoke exposure, eliminate a common asthma trigger, reduce the risk of fire, have a cleaner building, and improve air quality for all residents including smokers and their family members. Communicate clearly what will be required of residents to comply with the policy and how reports of violations will be addressed. Building-wide meetings also give residents an opportunity to speak up and have their questions and concerns addressed in advance. Hold the meetings at times that are accessible to residents, announce the meetings in advance by email or on flyers (in multiple languages if needed), and highlight that snacks will be available.

Incentives for Signing Smokefree Lease Addendum

Celebrate the adoption of a smokefree policy, and the implementation date, as a positive change for the residents. Have several opportunities (both day and evening hours) for residents to sign the smokefree lease addendum in the leasing office, lobby, or community room. As with meetings, announce the signing opportunities in advance by email or flyers, and highlight that snacks will be available.

Celebrate Implementation and Set Expectation of Compliance

Hold a building-wide party on the day (or evening) of implementation to celebrate the positive benefits of the building becoming smokefree. Feature music, food, and have a drawing for prizes, such as a gift card to a grocery store, a pair of movie tickets, or another item or service that appeals to the building’s residents. The best incentives may not cost management anything, but can mean a lot to residents, such as free use of the community room, or free parking for a month. One Housing Authority offered residents the incentive of being eligible to have your name drawn to have your unit-re-painted or have new carpet installed.

Cessation Support

Explore ways to provide cessation support to residents who smoke. This can help residents feel supported as they approach the transition to living in a smokefree building, which may feel intimidating and frustrating to residents who smoke. Provide information about cessation classes and resources offered by the local or state health department, Quit Line, American Lung Association, or American Cancer Society. Inquire if there’s a possibility of having an on-site cessation support group, and if residents would be interested in that convenience. Work with cessation resources to offer free or reduced-price cessation aids, such as a month’s supply of nicotine replacement patches or gum. This may be motivating for residents who want to comply with the policy while addressing nighttime cravings.