

Coalitions Combine Forces for Cleaner Air in New Orleans

GHEA and LCP

Summary

“New Orleans is to smoking as rice is to beans,” stated James Varney of the city’s Times Picayune newspaper. For workers and visitors, this means secondhand smoke exposure. Partners including the Louisiana Comprehensive Cancer Control Program (LCCCP) and the Geographic Health Equity Alliance (GHEA) provided stakeholders information and data on the health impact of smoking, exposure to secondhand smoke, and related health disparities. Thanks to a community-wide effort, bars, casinos, other indoor worksites and public spaces are smoke-free.

Challenge

Louisiana has the fifth highest cigarette smoking rate among all states in the U.S. It is second only to Nevada in the percentage of workers who work in workplaces that are not smoke-free. There are barriers that make tobacco prevention and control difficult in New Orleans, including widespread access to inexpensive tobacco and high levels of poverty. Further, the issues that stem from high tobacco use such as frequent exposure to secondhand smoke, increased risks of developing diseases like cancer, and little to no access to health care services like cancer screening also make cancer prevention and control difficult and can complicate efforts to reach and educate the city’s population. The partnership heard from musicians whose livelihoods were threatened by damage to their vocal cords and lungs from secondhand smoke in musical venues, as well as a blackjack dealer with lung cancer who had never smoked a day in his life.

Solution

LCCCP contributed to raising awareness about the concerns of the city’s bar and casino employees and tourists by speaking with them and sharing their stories, as well as giving stakeholders data on the harmful health effects of smoking and secondhand smoke on New Orleans culture and livelihood. GHEA collected information and stories from public health professionals and even—in a nod to the fun-loving atmosphere of the city—documented the “Smoke-Free NOLA” parade through the city streets in order to promote awareness of the negative impact of secondhand smoke exposure on the health of the community and its visitors. The informational campaign made people in the city sit up and take notice about the issue of secondhand smoke exposure.



Your Involvement Is Key

Everyone can work to make their communities smoke-free.

Acknowledge businesses that are smoke-free and let them know you are supporting them and organize smoke-free events in collaboration with these businesses. Make sure employers that allow smoking in their establishments understand that the vast majority of people do not smoke and that they may actually be losing business because of secondhand smoke. Lastly, participate in any state or local coalitions striving for smoke-free air

Results

Outside of GHEA and LCCCP, a coalition of health and cultural organizations was brought together by City Councilwoman, LaToya Cantrell, who proposed a comprehensive smoke-free law for indoor worksites and public places, including bars and casinos. The law was unanimously approved by the New Orleans City Council in April 2015. Thanks to the educational efforts of LCCCP and GHEA, and the work of the organizations convened by Councilwoman Cantrell, thousands more people can now work and gather in a smoke-free environment. New Orleans musicians, singers, and bar and casino staff, as well as local residents and visitors, can now breathe easy in the “Big Easy”. The work highlights the importance of partnerships in ensuring wider access to information to increase awareness of the causes of cancer and health disparities.

Contact

GHEA and LCP

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“Starting April 22, all workers in New Orleans will be able to breathe clean air. This absolutely would not have happened without an unflinching leader, a strong local effort, and invested national partners. Collaboration got this done.”

- Lydia Kuykendal

Sustainable Success

Given the number of bars in the city, and the presence of a land-based casino, living and working in a smoke-free environment may have broad-ranging effect. On average, across the nation, 82 percent of indoor workers have access to a smoke-free workplace. Only 71 percent of workers in Louisiana currently work in smoke-free areas, and the implementation of the New Orleans smoke-free law could help move that percentage closer to the national average.