

# Franklin County Multi-Unit Housing Residents Engage in Smoke-Free Policy Discussions

## SUMMARY

On April 17, 2017, approximately 15-20 residents of Bending Brook Apartments in Grove City, Ohio, attended an initial meeting in the implementation of a property-wide smoke-free policy. Bending Brook is a U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) community managed by Homeport in southwest Franklin County. Franklin County Public

Health has partnered with Homeport to serve as a resource in providing technical assistance, resources (such as signage and cessation services) and support to property management and residents. The property will be 100 percent smoke-free and additionally prohibits the use of electronic smoking devices, hookahs and smoking in vehicles on the property. The effective date of the smoke-free policy is July 2017.

## CHALLENGE

The negative health effects in Franklin County due to smoking are significant. According to its most recent community health assessment (HealthMap 2016), 20.2% of Franklin County residents are current smokers. This is up from 18.3% from just three years ago. In Franklin County, tobacco use continues to be responsible for high mortality and morbidity rates related to chronic lower respiratory diseases and malignant neoplasms (cancer). African Americans share an unequal burden of disease compared to non-Hispanic Whites and smoke at a rate of 25.3% compared to 21.4% for Whites.

Due to the high mortality and morbidity rates caused by exposure to secondhand smoke and the additional cost of maintaining properties occupied by smokers, HUD has adopted a rule that requires all its multi-unit housing across the country to go smoke-free by the end of 2018. As a HUD-funded community, Bending Brook was identified to be an early adopter of this new policy.

Additionally, approximately 75% of current residents at the Bending Brook property are of Somali descent. This posed a unique challenge to the health department's outreach efforts due to language barriers and cultural differences.

## DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS

The residents in attendance at the meeting were fully engaged and asked many thoughtful questions. To help overcome the cultural and language barriers of the Somali population, the health department contracted with an interpreter agency for services.



Residents of Bending Brook Apartments in Grove City engage in discussions with Franklin County and Columbus Public Health representatives on the implementation of a smoke-free policy.

Questions and concerns ranged from how will compliance be enforced to who will pay for cessation services. The following highlights a portion of the nearly 2-hour discussion:

*Does this mean I can't smoke inside my apartment?* **Yes.**

*Will there be designated smoking areas?* **No. This policy extends to the entire boundaries of the property and includes not smoking in vehicles.**

*I've been smoking all my life; how do you expect me to quit?* **This policy does not require residents to quit smoking. Its primary intent is to reduce exposure to the negative effects of secondhand smoke. However, the health department will help you with attaining cessation services if you choose to quit.**

*How will the policy be enforced?* **The written policy outlines the enforcement plan which includes the progressive issuance of a written warning, written violations and lease violations.**

*Am I responsible for my guests who smoke?* **Yes. Each resident is required to ensure that their guests follow the smoking policy. No smoking signs/decals for posting in the window of each unit will be provided by management.**

*What if I want to move?* **You will be allowed to move with no penalty prior to the implementation of this lease in July.**

## **SUSTAINING SUCCESS**

Virtually none of the multi-unit housing spaces in the priority areas of Grove City, Prairie Township and Franklin Township are smoke-free; nor do they have written lease policies for residents to sign prior to moving in. Through the Franklin County Tobacco Use Prevention and Cessation Grant, FCPH intends to reach the managers and residents of public and private multi-unit housing complexes by contacting them directly and by sending letters to inform this population of the benefits of having smoke-free policies. We also intend to attach a survey to the letter with a return envelope, which will ask owners/managers questions relating to their interest of adopting a smoking policy for residents. Returned surveys will be reviewed and the FCPH will reach out to complexes showing interest in adopting a smoking policy.