

THE EDGE OF CHAOS

Smoking Cessation in Public Housing

Wicked Problem Session: August 3rd, 2017

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OVERVIEW

This project has been centered on the United States Department of Housing's final ruling that requires that all directly funded public housing employ a smoke free policy by July 30th of 2018. This gives public housing authorities one and a half years at the maximum to implement this policy. Since HUD is allowing the Public Housing Authorities to come up

with their own no-smoking policies under the established HUD guidelines. When this policy was put into place questions arose about the potential negative consequences. In order to better understand and help the Housing Authorities both implement this policy in the most effective manner, a policy analysis is being carried out over the next year.

DISCUSSION MEMBERS

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About the Edge of Chaos

The Edge of Chaos is a Public Health Innovation think tank operating under the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Public Health and in conjunction with the Lister Hill Public Policy. Its goal is to examine public health and policy issues facing the city of Birmingham and create practical solutions to complex problems or "wicked" problems by facilitating collaboration between experts in academia, the business sector, and the community (including the not-for-profit sector)

Academia + business + community = real solutions.

Smoking in the Gulf States among Low-Income Americans

Over the past decades, smoking in the United States has led to significant health care problems. The Kaiser Foundation's analysis of Center for Disease Control (CDC) Tobacco usage data showed that around 16.8% people in the United States still smoke; while this number has been on a gradual decline in the overall population, low-income Americans continue to smoke at an alarming rate. To date, approximately 81% of the states that have smoking populations above the national average (22 out of 27 states) have per capita incomes below the national average, according to 2015 data. Among these states, Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi rank as three of the five poorest states, each with very high smoking rates, and have observed the smallest decrement in smoking rates over time.¹ This discrepancy is evident in the smoking policies of these three states. The policies in the major cities in these three states, as of now, are based around the statewide issued bans on smoking in most public enclosed areas, and allows cities to develop and implement their own legislature prohibiting smoking. Few cities in these three states have developed definitive smoking policies, and those cities that do have stronger prohibitions have not seen substantial changes in their citizens smoking behavior – which is likely indicative problems with enforcing the law. On the other hand Texas and Florida, which are the two Gulf States with the lowest smoking rates, have adopted very strict policies related to smoking. In Texas, selling tobacco to a minor is considered a criminal offense and Florida has implemented far stricter laws regarding designated smoking areas. Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana have weaker statewide smoking ordinance and local legislation lacks substantive prohibition. The lack of strong policy, enforcement and socio-economic status (SES) are not the only factors related to this issue. While Texas and Florida have lower smoking rates, they also differ from the other Gulf States in education, and there is strong correlation nationally that shows that individuals who have only received a GED or less are far more likely to smoke, as well as have a harder time quitting smoking.¹ Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana all rank significantly below the national average with regards to student progress through the 4th and 8th grades, as well as in high school graduation rate and standardized test scores. This could possibly be a large factor into the high smoking rates in young adults (ages 18-24) in these three states.

HUD Policy



HUD's mission is to create strong, sustainable, inclusive communities and quality affordable homes for all.

HUD is attempting to incentivize a large group of low SES Americans (those who live in public housing) by implementing a policy (that must be in place by the third fiscal quarter of 2018) that would at a minimum ban all smoking within the public or private regions of the housing units, as well as within 25 feet of any entrance, window, or ventilation system.

The Policy is centered on expanded clean air and secondhand smoke acts. HUD wants to prevent tenants who do not smoke from smokers living in other units since the units are connected via ventilation. This policy (if enforced thoroughly) would also stand to save HUD almost half of a billion dollars in reduced fire-risk cost and additional maintenance.



Potential conflict with HUD's goal to end Homelessness

There has been controversy over the implementation of this ruling with regards to HUD's goal to end homelessness, and, although this ruling would create positive external health and financial outcomes downstream for both smokers and those who are often exposed to SHS, it may put a generation of low income Americans at risk for becoming homeless. Furthermore, this policy has been criticized for targeting the most disadvantaged subset of low-income Americans, and perhaps did not take into account the addictive nature of nicotine and smoking. Additionally, HUD has urged Public Housing Authorities to reach out to local health agencies and work together in order to help smokers quit. However many of the resources provided are not enough to help people quit, and it is far too much of a financial burden for these low income Americans to purchase more effective means of quitting.

However, the HUD policy does not stop people from smoking, but simply restricts the area in which tenants are allowed to smoke. This brings up other issues for tenants with physical or mental disabilities who might have trouble accessing areas where smoking is allowed.

As this policy went through discussion in open forum, lots of questions about potential pitfalls of this policy were brought up. However within this discussion, it is important to keep in mind the positive health benefits for society and its individuals. As people have become more educated about the dangers and health consequences, there has been a large push to protect the non-smokers from secondhand smoke - this is the primary goal of the policy. This policy could prove to be a great leap forward for the societal health.

Discussion Questions

Potential Issues

Since different Public Housing Authorities are allowed to set their own infraction policies, could this create inequity between living in the different Public Housing Units?

- + How would we monitor that?

HUD has emphasized some degree of leniency with regards to enforcing the policy - however, if people still smoke in their rooms then the policy is ineffective

- + How do we help Public Housing Authorities find the middle ground to make the policy effective but not put smokers at a disadvantage?

- + Potential Issues with the tenants with mental disorders, as well accessibility to areas where smoking is allowed

Potential evictions that may lead to bouts with homelessness

- + What type of questions should we ask to see if people are on the brink of eviction? And how many smoking infractions they have

Downstream healthcare cost of multiple re-hospitalizations of the homeless

- + Of the people with a smoking addiction, how many have other problems with substance abuse?
- + What other Issues could result from the policy?

Potential Benefits

Long-term and short-term health benefits for those people who do not smoke due to the decreased exposure

How do we emphasize these points, and what data could/would help us illustrate these points?

Long-term health benefits for those smokers who are able to curb their addiction

The policy does not require Public Housing to provide any cessation program, how could we encourage local healthcare providers and agencies to provide some support?

- + Saves around .5 Billion dollars in reduce maintenance and fire-risk cost
- + What other benefits could result from this policy?

Positive No-Smoking Incentives

It is important to understand that this issue is extremely complex due to the amount of variables that have a significant impact on the outcome of this policy, and that due to this complexity there is no definite solution to the problem that could potentially arise. However, as this policy begins to take hold over the next two years a flux of information will be available to analyze and help institute this policy in a more effective manner.

One important point that has been made is that there is potentially space to implement positive financial no-smoking incentives in Public Housing authorities.