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## Press Release

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### Smoke-free subsidized housing would save \$521 million a year

*Savings in health care costs alone estimated at almost \$350 million a year*


The estimated annual cost savings from eliminating smoking in all U.S. subsidized housing would be \$521 million, according to a new study from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This is the first study to estimate the costs that could be saved by prohibiting smoking in subsidized housing, including public housing and other rental assistance programs. The bulk of those annual savings – \$341 million – would come from reduced health care expenditures related to secondhand smoke. The study also estimates savings of \$108 million in annual renovation expenses and \$72 million in annual smoking-related fire losses.

"Many of the more than 7 million Americans living in subsidized housing in the United States are children, the elderly or disabled," said Tim McAfee, M.D., M.P.H., director of the Office on Smoking and Health at CDC. "These are people who are most sensitive to being exposed to secondhand smoke. This report shows that there are substantial financial benefits to implementing smoke-free policies, in addition to the health benefits those policies bring."

The study also estimated the cost savings associated with prohibiting smoking in all U.S. public housing, which is a portion of subsidized housing managed by public housing authorities. The total annual savings for public housing would be about \$154 million a year, including \$101 million from health care costs related to secondhand smoke exposure, \$32 million from renovation expenses, and \$21 million from smoking-attributable fire losses.

Studies have shown that people who live in multiunit housing can be particularly affected by unwanted secondhand smoke exposure. Other studies have shown that most people who live in subsidized housing favor smoke-free policies.


"Secondhand smoke enters nearby apartments from common areas and apartments where smoking is occurring," said Brian King Ph.D., an epidemiologist with CDC's Office on Smoking and Health and lead author of the report. "Opening windows and installing ventilation systems will not fully eliminate exposure to secondhand smoke. Implementing smoke-free policies in all areas is the most effective way to fully protect all residents, visitors, and employees from the harmful effects of secondhand smoke."

Secondhand smoke is responsible for about 50,000 deaths a year in the United States. The 2006 Surgeon General's Report, The Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke (<http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/reports/secondhandsmoke/report-index.html>)  (<http://www.cdc.gov/Other/disclaimer.html>), concluded that secondhand smoke is

also known to cause numerous health problems in infants and children, including more frequent and severe asthma attacks, respiratory infections, ear infections, and sudden infant death syndrome. In the same report, the Surgeon General concluded that there is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke, and that only 100 percent smoke-free indoor policies can fully protect people from secondhand smoke dangers.


The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has encouraged public housing authorities, as well as owners and managers of multi-family housing rental assistance programs such as Section 8, to adopt smoke-free policies in their properties. As of January 2012, more than 250 public housing authorities have gone smoke-free. But overall, only a small percentage of public housing authorities have implemented smoke-free policies. Educating housing operators and residents about the health and economic benefits of prohibiting smoking and providing resources and information on quitting smoking could help increase the number of subsidized housing residents protected by smoke-free policies.

"This new study reinforces the importance of the Housing and Urban Development initiative to promote the adoption of smoke-free housing policies in public housing and other federally-assisted multifamily housing," said Sandra Henriquez, HUD's Assistant Secretary for Public and Indian Housing. "We have seen considerable momentum in the number of public housing agencies across the country adopting this policy, which saves health and housing costs, in places like Boston, San Antonio, Seattle, and all public housing in the state of Maine."

To learn more about the benefits of smoke-free policies, visit [www.cdc.gov/tobacco](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco) (<http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco>). For information on quitting smoking call 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669). Also, visit [www.BeTobaccoFree.gov](http://www.BeTobaccoFree.gov) (<http://www.BeTobaccoFree.gov>)  (<http://www.cdc.gov/Other/disclaimer.html>) for information on quitting and preventing children from using tobacco. For stories of people who have quit successfully, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/tips> (<http://www.cdc.gov/tips>).

Full text of the article is available to journalists upon request.

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