

# SMOKE-FREE LAWS

## *Effective Messages*

---

Our most effective message in support of smoke-free laws in all indoor workplaces and public places, including bars, restaurants, public transportation, etc., is simple: Everyone has the right to breathe clean air in public places and at work because secondhand smoke causes serious health problems like heart disease, cancer, and others. This is true for the public, and once policy makers understand the evidence AND public support for these laws, they too are more likely to be supportive.

### **Effective Messages**

- **Communicate the real dangers of secondhand smoke.** We know that support for smoke-free laws grows as people understand that secondhand smoke is not just an annoyance but a real health hazard that causes heart disease, cancer, and other serious health problems among non-smokers. Educating the public about the dangers of secondhand smoke underscores why everyone has the right to breathe clean air. There are a number of ways to communicate the dangers of secondhand smoke, but the most effective messages focus on specific health effects and exposure to chemicals.

Specific health effects: Exposure to secondhand smoke is a cause of serious health problems, including cancer and heart disease.

Exposure to chemicals: Secondhand smoke contains 7,000 chemicals and more than 60 carcinogens, including formaldehyde, arsenic, lead, etc.

- **Emphasize the right to breathe clean air.** Knowing the harms of secondhand smoke empowers people to express their right to breathe clean air and support for comprehensive smoke-free laws. The right to breathe clean air is also an effective message in countering opposition arguments about business owners' and smokers' alleged rights, as most people view this as more important than the right of smokers to smoke in public places and more important than the right of business owners to determine their own smoking policies.
- **Emphasize fairness and the fact that all workers should be protected.** Given the negative health effects of secondhand smoke, protecting all workers is a key reason to support smoke-free laws that cover all venues, including restaurants and bars. Emphasizing the health impact (secondhand smoke is harmful) and fairness (it's only fair that all workers should have the same level of protection) is the most compelling way to communicate about workers.
- **Highlight the support of major public health groups.** Reputable public health entities in government, civil society, academia, etc. are trusted sources of information on health issues, so highlighting their support for smoke-free laws can help convince people and policy makers of the importance of smoke-free laws. These groups can also serve as effective messengers on the issue.
- **Real Stories from Real People:** Data and evidence are very important, but stories from real people who have to breathe secondhand smoke at work or other public places and/or have suffered the consequences help make the evidence real for policy makers, media, and the public. These might include workers in the hospitality industry or others that still allow smoking. Business owners from jurisdictions that have gone smoke-free or who have done so voluntarily can be especially convincing in the communicating the benefits of smoke-free laws – healthier employees, lower maintenance costs, thriving business, etc.

**Countering Opposition Messages**

The most common messages in opposition to smoke-free laws are the rights of business owners and smokers and the potential negative impact on business, especially in the hospitality industry. T

- **The best answer on business owners' rights is noted above** – that the right of everyone to breathe clean air, free of the disease- and death-causing chemicals in secondhand smoke is far more important.
- **Playing defense on the economic impact of smoke-free laws is less effective than focusing on health.** While we need and have conclusive evidence that smoke-free laws do not harm business and in fact benefits them (see fact sheets), we should quickly answer and such charges and return to focus on health as the reason for enacting smoke-free laws. When opponents raise the potential economic consequences of smoke-free laws, the best rebuttal is simply that everybody has the right to breathe clean air, and that we must protect the health of customers and employees. We can add that smoke-free laws do not have a negative economic impact with evidence to support that, but we are better returning any discussion to health and everyone's right to breathe clean indoor air. We want to keep the argument focused on health.

**Conclusions**

- There is strong support for laws prohibiting smoking in public places and workplaces. It is clear that we should continue to frame our efforts to pass smoke-free laws in the context of comprehensive laws that cover public places and all workplaces, including offices, restaurants and bars.
- The most effective way to generate support for smoke-free laws is to emphasize the right to breathe clean air because of the deadly health effects of secondhand smoke. Simply stating that "everybody has the right to breathe clean air in public places and at work" has proven to be a compelling message.
- Communicating and reinforcing the dangers of secondhand smoke (chemicals and health effects), with trusted health authorities serving as key validators in this effort, is critical as the basis for the right to breathe clean air.
- The key is to stay on our turf (the health argument). There is little need to focus on the economic argument except to dismiss it as settled by evidence from around the world.