

2011

# Smoke-Free Public Housing Policies in Nebraska

Tobacco Free Nebraska  
Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services  
Division of Public Health



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# Executive Summary

In 2011, an online survey was conducted with directors of Public Housing Authorities in Nebraska to assess the extent of smoke-free policies in their facilities and some of the perceived benefits and obstacles of the policies. A total of 65 directors participated in the survey with a response rate of 46%.

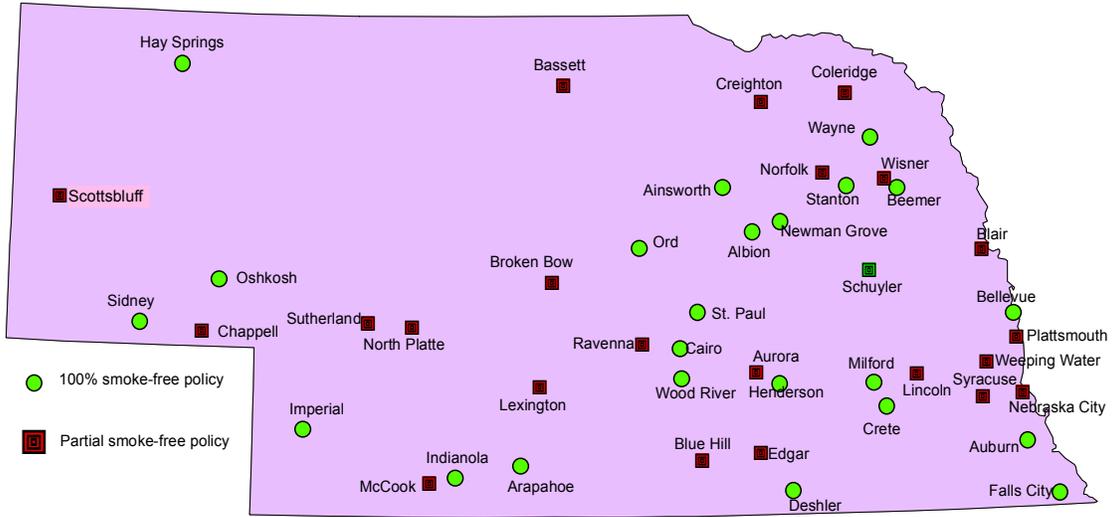
## *Major Findings*

- Two-thirds of respondents (62%) had adopted an indoor smoke-free policy.
  - 40% of respondents had adopted a 100% indoor smoke-free policy.
  - 22% had adopted partial smoke-free policies that restricted smoking in some but not all indoor places.
- In 2010 alone, 17 Public Housing Authorities adopted smoke-free policies.
- The majority of respondents (91%) strongly agree or agree that it is legal for Public Housing Authorities to implement a smoke-free policy.
- The most noted benefits of implementing smoke-free policies were: reduced fire risk (100%), improved indoor air quality (99%), improved resident health (94%), and reduced rehabilitation costs (94%).
- Enforcement (75%) was the most cited barrier to implementing a smoke-free policy.

**Nebraska Public Housing Authorities**  
**who reported they had a smoke-free policy, 2010**

<b>Housing Authorities with <u>100%</u> Smoke-Free Policies</b>	<b>Housing Authorities with <u>Partial</u> Smoke-Free Policies</b>
Ainsworth Housing Agency	Aurora Housing Authority
Albion Housing Authority	Bassett Housing Authority
Arapahoe Housing Authority	Blair Housing Authority
Auburn Housing Authority	Blue Hill Housing Authority
Beemer Housing Authority	Broken Bow Housing Authority
Bellevue Housing Authority	Chappell Housing Authority
Cairo Housing Authority	Coleridge Housing Authority
Crete Housing Authority	Creighton Housing Authority
Deshler Housing Authority	Edgar Housing Authority
Falls City Housing Authority	Housing Authority City of Wisner
Hay Springs Housing Authority	Lexington Housing Authority
Henderson/Midtown Housing Authority	Lincoln Housing Authority
Imperial Housing Authority	McCook Housing Agency
Indianola Housing Authority	Nebraska City Housing Authority
Milford Housing Authority	Norfolk Housing Agency
Newman Grove Housing Authority	North Platte Housing Authority
Ord Housing Authority	Plattsmouth Housing Authority
Oshkosh Housing Authority	Ravenna Housing Authority
Sidney Housing Authority	Schuyler Housing Agency
St. Paul Housing Authority	Scotts Bluff County Housing Authority
Stanton Housing Authority	Sutherland Housing Authority
Wayne Housing Authority	Syracuse Housing Authority
Wood River Housing Authority	Weeping Water Housing Authority

## Smoke-Free Public Housing in Nebraska, 2010



## Introduction

Between March and May 2011, an online survey was conducted with directors of Public Housing Authorities in Nebraska to assess the extent of smoke-free policies in their facilities and some of the benefits and perceived obstacles to the policies. This report provides the survey findings.

There are 142 Public Housing Authorities in Nebraska. The Housing Authorities manage a total of 7,700 public housing units with 56% elderly and 44% non-elderly tenants.<sup>1</sup> People who live in public housing units include the elderly, disabled individuals, families in crisis, and working families. Living in public housing units can leave residents vulnerable to secondhand smoke<sup>2</sup>.

### Background

Research has shown that exposure to secondhand smoke is detrimental to the health of both children and adults. The 2006 U.S. Surgeon

#### **Landlords and Property Managers have the Right to Limit Smoking**

- ➔ There is no judicially recognized “right to smoke” in a multiunit dwelling, whether it is privately owned or public housing.
- ➔ In all fifty states private landlords, public housing authorities, and affordable housing owners can prohibit smoking in individual units as well as in common areas.
- ➔ In 2011, HUD issued recommendations “strongly encouraging” public housing authorities to enact smoke-free policies, and a number of other HUD opinions and cases approve the right of a public housing authority to prohibit smoking in properties subject to HUD authority.

**Source:** Susan Schoenmarklin, “*Infiltration of Secondhand Smoke into Condominiums, Apartments and Other Dwelling.*” Tobacco Control Consortium, 2009.

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<sup>1</sup> The Nebraska Chapter of the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NE NAHRO), 2011

<sup>2</sup> Schoenmarklin, 2009

General's Report concluded that "secondhand smoke exposure causes disease and premature death in children and adults who do not smoke." Secondhand smoke is a major cause of preventable morbidity and mortality and has been linked to serious health problems in both children and adults.<sup>3</sup> Children are especially sensitive to secondhand smoke. Asthma, lung infections, and ear infections are more common in children who are around smokers.<sup>4</sup> Some of these problems can be serious and even life-threatening.

Smoke-free air laws have been passed in many states – including Nebraska – to protect non-smokers from secondhand smoke in public places and places of employment.<sup>5</sup> Homes remain the primary place where non-smokers are exposed to secondhand smoke.<sup>6</sup> Homeowners have the opportunity to adopt smoke-free rules in their homes and the percentage of homeowners who have adapted the smoke-free home policy has been increasing.<sup>7</sup> However, families living in multi-unit housing may be exposed to secondhand smoke that permeates through openings – such as cracks and open windows and doors – from neighbors who smoke in their homes. In addition to the increased risk of secondhand smoke-related diseases, non-smokers are also at an increased risk from cigarette-caused fires.

Although Public Housing Authorities have the right to adopt smoke-free policies for their units, there are factors that may hinder the process. A number of studies have been conducted across the country to examine owners' and managers' perceptions

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<sup>3</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2011

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS), 2010; 2006

<sup>5</sup> Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights Foundation, 2010

<sup>6</sup> USDHHS, 2006

<sup>7</sup> from 76% in 2003 to 84% to 2011 (Source: Nebraska Adult Tobacco Survey, 2011)

about smoke-free housing.<sup>8</sup> These studies have helped highlight the benefits of implementing smoke-free policies in public housing facilities as well as any potential barriers and misconceptions that might exist.

A comprehensive statewide study of smoke-free policies in Public Housing Authorities and the perception of these policies have not been conducted to date. However, local tobacco prevention coalitions working on smoke-free housing have conducted surveys to determine the proportion of multi-unit housing in their areas that have smoke-free policies in place. Although information collected by local coalitions is useful, there is a gap in the knowledge base about smoke-free multi-unit housing in both market- and public-based housing statewide.

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<sup>8</sup> Pizacani, Laughter, Menagh, Stark, Drach, & Hermann-Franzen, 2009; Massachusetts Smoke-Free Housing Project Health Advocacy Institute, 2008; Center for Energy and Environment, 2001; Cramer, Roberts, and Stevens, 2010.

## Methodology

Tobacco Free Nebraska developed a questionnaire to measure the adoption of smoke-free policies, as well as attitudes and beliefs towards the policies. The design process was based on a review of literature and surveys used in other states and locales.

The survey was administered as a census. A list of public housing directors was secured from the Nebraska Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO). An invitation to participate in the survey was sent by email to all directors on the list, with a follow-up email sent two weeks later.

A web-based survey method was used. The directors received emails that contained a link to the web survey. The survey instrument (see Appendix A) was developed internally by Tobacco Free Nebraska.

Emails were sent to 142 public housing directors. Responses were received from 65 directors resulting in a response rate of 46% (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Survey Response Rates**

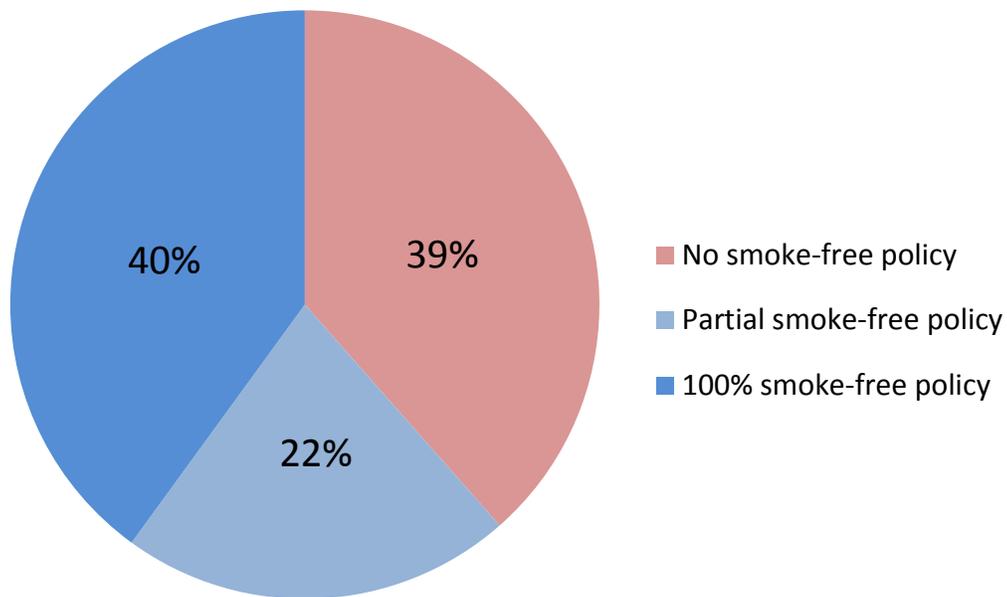
	<b>Number</b>	<b>Rate</b>
Respondents	65	45.8%
Non-respondents	77	54.2%
Total	142	100.0%

## Results

### *Smoke-Free Public Housing Policies*

Nearly two-thirds (62%) of respondents had adopted a smoke-free policy. Of those, 40% had adopted a 100% indoor smoke-free policy in all units in all buildings. A little more than one in five (22%) had adopted a policy that partially restricted smoking in some indoor areas. Slightly more than a third (39%) of the respondents had not adopted any smoke-free policy in any units or buildings.

**Figure 1. Smoke-Free Policies among Nebraska Public Housing Authorities**



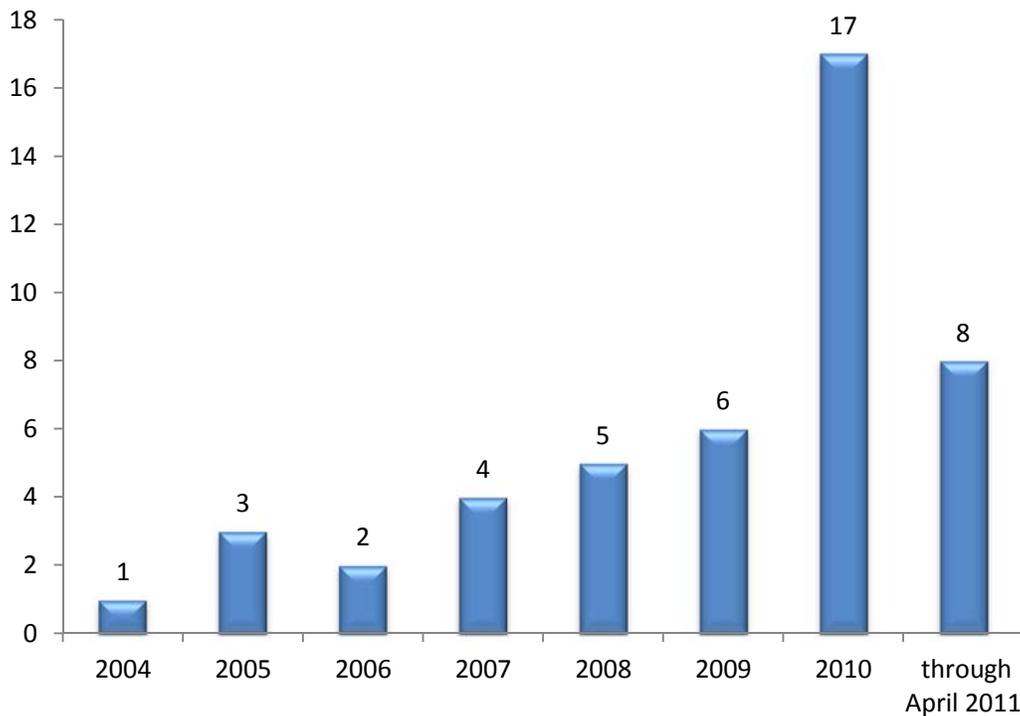
## Adoption of Smoke-Free Policies

The Kearney (Nebraska) Housing Authority adopted one of the country's first smoke-free housing policies in 1997. Between 1997 and the mid-2000s, however, the adoption of smoke-free housing policies by Nebraska Public Housing Authorities stalled.

The adoption of policies took off again in 2004, and since then the number of local housing authorities that have adopted smoke-free policies has been on the rise. In 2010 alone, 17 Nebraska housing authorities adopted smoke-free policies.

**Figure 2. Smoke-Free Policies in Public Housing Authorities**

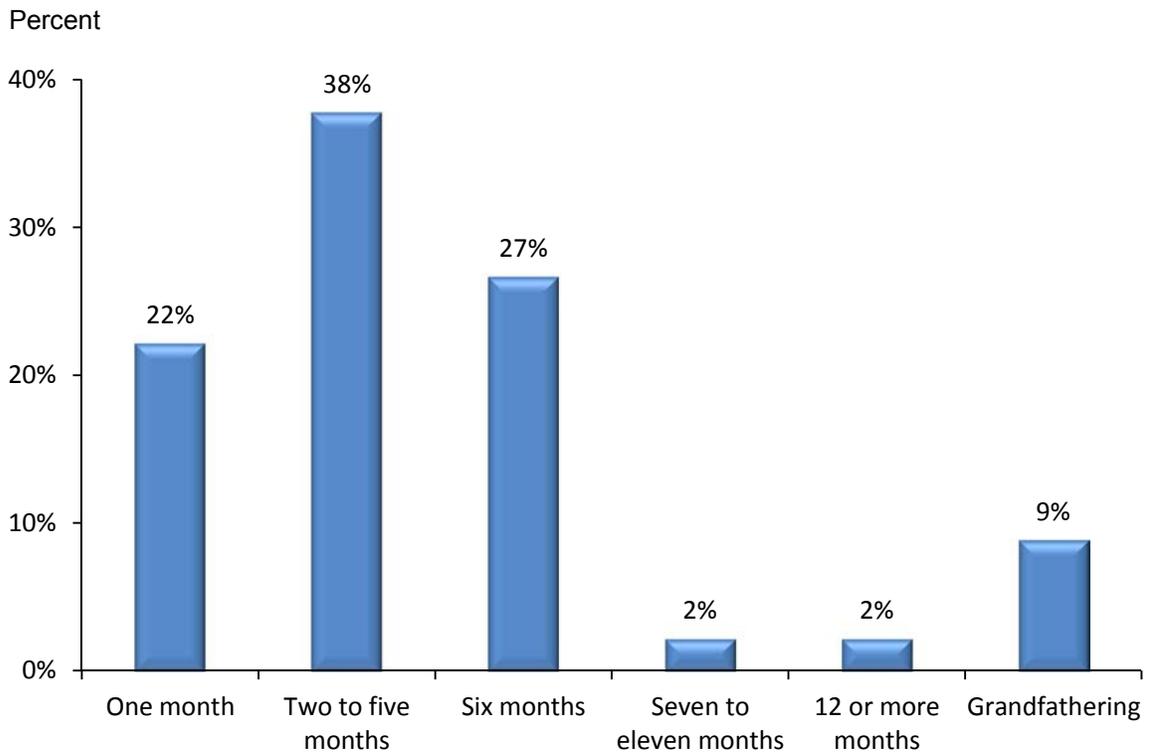
Number of Housing  
Authorities



## Notice to Residents before Implementation of a Smoke-free Policy

Advance notice to residents of Public Housing Authorities informing them of the new smoke-free policy is important to help ensure the success of the policy. In Nebraska, resident notice was given in varying timeframes prior to the implementation of the smoke-free policy, with most housing authorities providing notice from two to six months beforehand. About a tenth (9%) grandfathered some existing residents allowing those residents to continue smoking in their units until the resident moved out or renewed their lease.

**Figure 3. Amount of Notice Given to Residents before Implementation of Smoke-Free Policy**

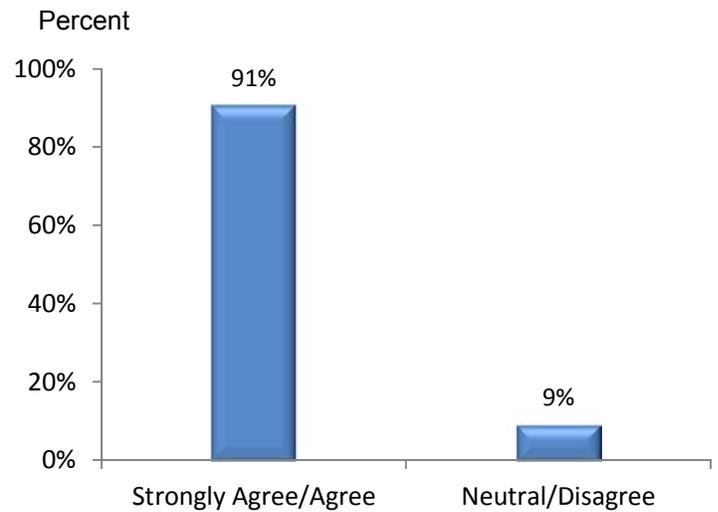


## Perceptions about Smoke-Free Policies

### Legality of Smoke-Free Policies

The majority of respondents (91%) strongly agree or agree that implementing a smoke-free policy in public housing was legal. Only 9% of the respondents were neutral or disagreed.

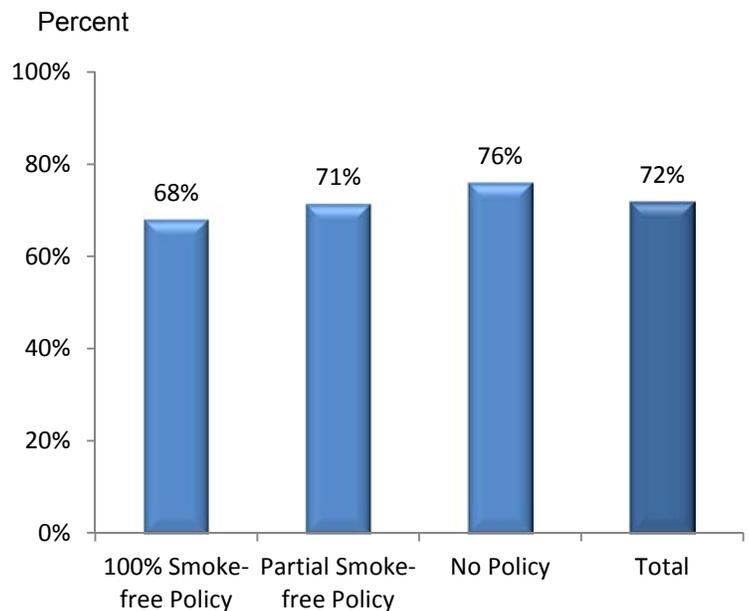
Figure 4. Perceptions about the Legality of Smoke-Free Policies in Public Housing



### Belief that Enforcement of a Smoke-Free Policy is Difficult

Over two-thirds of respondents (68%, 71% and 76% for 100% smoke-free policy and partial smoke-free policy, respectively) strongly agree or agree that enforcement of smoke-free policies in public housing was difficult. Those with 100% smoke-free policies (68%) were less likely to strongly agree or agree than those with either partial (71.4%) or no policy (76.0%) in place.

Figure 5. Belief that Enforcing a Smoke-Free Policy is Difficult by Type of Policy

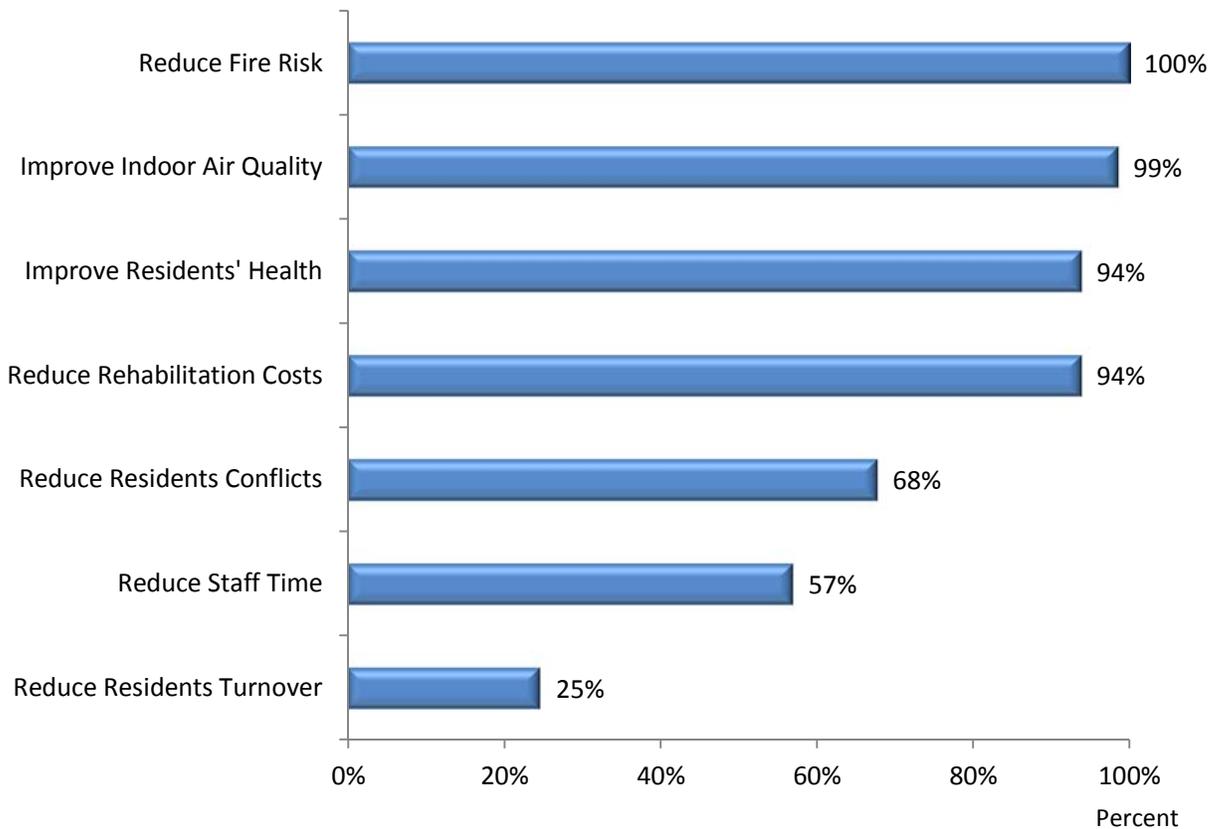


## Perceived Benefits

Almost all respondents agreed with four main benefits of implementing a smoke-free policy:

- reduced fire risk (100%)
- improved indoor air quality (99%)
- improved resident health (94%) and
- reduced rehabilitation costs (94%)

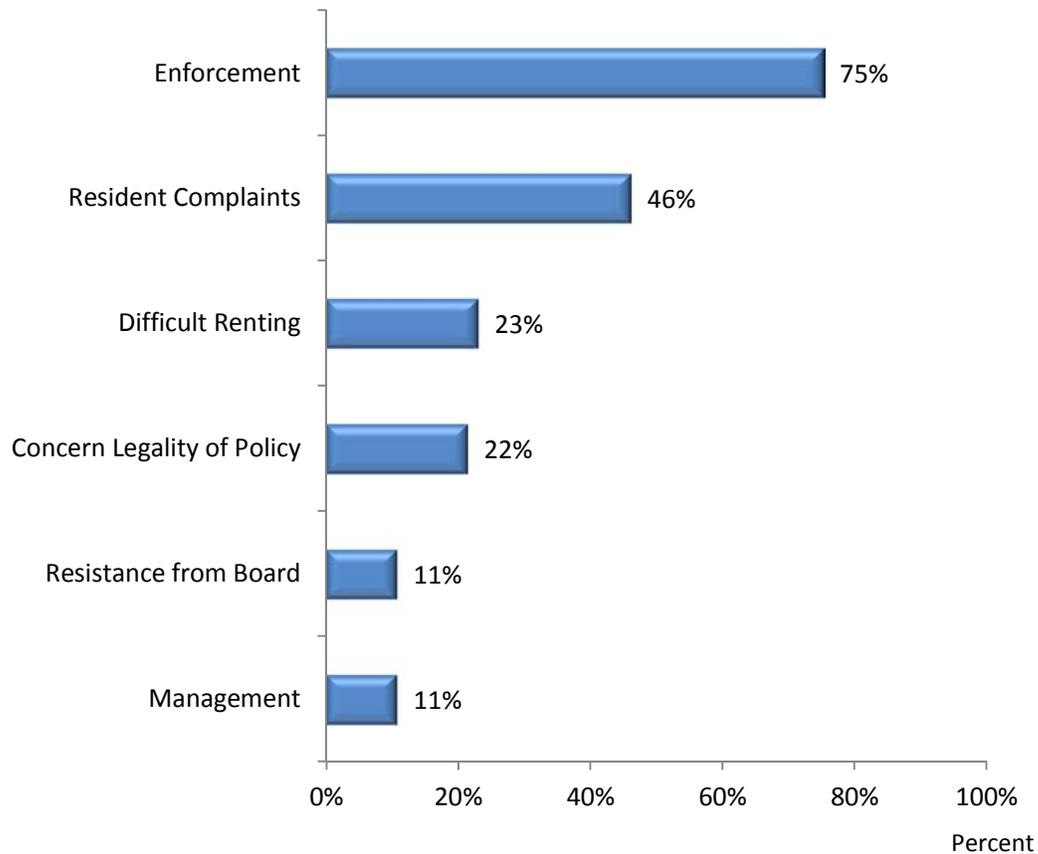
**Figure 6. Perceived Benefits of a Smoke-Free Policy**



## Perceived Barriers

The majority of respondents considered enforcement (75%) as the major barrier to implementing a smoke-free policy. Almost half of respondents considered resident complaints as a barrier.

**Figure 7. Perceived Barriers to Implementing a Smoke-Free Policy**



## Conclusion

This study shows a trend towards the adoption of smoke-free policies by Nebraska Public Housing Authorities. To date, nearly two-thirds of the Public Housing Authorities in Nebraska have adopted a smoke-free policy with 40% having adopted a 100% smoke-free policy in all units and buildings. The trend toward adopting smoke-free policies started in 2004 and showed a large spike in 2010/11. The trends could be attributed to the implementation of Nebraska's smoke-free air law in June of 2009.

There is also a clear awareness among most Public Housing Authority directors about the legality of adopting a smoke-free policy with over 90% agreeing or strongly agreeing that smoke-free policies in public housing units are legal.

Although the majority of directors are aware of the legality of smoke-free policies, over two-thirds of respondents believed that enforcing smoke-free policies is difficult. This, however, is less likely among those that have adopted a 100% smoke-free policy than those with no policy in place.

Public Housing Authority directors also recognize the benefits of adopting a smoke-free policy. Almost all directors indicated that smoke-free policies help to: reduce fire risk; improve indoor air quality; improve resident health; and reduce rehabilitation costs.

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## ***Acknowledgement***

*We thank the Nebraska Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO) for their support of the Smoke Free Housing Survey.*

### **MISSION OF NEBRASKA NAHRO**

***The Nebraska Chapter of the National Association of Housing & Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO) works towards the attainment of provisions for adequate housing for all people and toward the attainment of sound communities through the processes of development, preservation, conservation, and rehabilitation.***

## Appendix: Questionnaire

# Nebraska Public Housing Smoke-Free Policy Survey

## Question 1:

Name of Housing Authority

## Question 2:

What is the total number of public housing units your housing authority manages?

## Question 3:

Which of the following best describe the smoking policy for your housing units?

- a. All units are required to be 100% smoke-free indoors (including all units in all buildings)
- b. Some units are required to be 100% smoke-free, some aren't
- c. No units are required to be smoke-free indoors

## Question 4:

Approximately, what percent of your units are 100% smoke-free?

## Question 5:

Is a smoke-free policy included in your lease agreement?

- a. Yes
- b. No

## Question 6:

Did the smoke-free policy apply only to new residents or to all residents?

- a. Applied only to new residents
- b. Applied to all residents

**Question 7:**

How much advance notice did you give residents before implementation of a smoke-free policy?

- a. One month
- b. Two to five months
- c. Six months
- d. Seven to eleven months
- e. One year
- f. More than one year but less than two years
- g. Other – please specify

**Question 8:**

When did the smoke-free policy go into effect?

Date

**Question 9:**

Are you planning to expand your current smoke-free policies?

- a. Yes
- b. No

**Question 10:**

Are you considering adopting a smoke-free policy for your public housing units?

**Question 11:**

Are you currently making plans to adopt a smoke-free policy?

- a. Yes
- b. No

**Question 12:**

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: It is legal for a Housing Authority to implement a smoke-free policy in public housing units.

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neutral
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

**Question 13:**

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: It is difficult to enforce smoke-free policies in public housing units.

- a. Reduce risk of fire
- b. Positive impact on residents' health
- c. Improved indoor air quality
- d. Reduced staff time to manage building
- e. Reduced residents' complaints
- f. Reduced residents turn-over
- g. Unsure
- h. Other – please specify

**Question 14:**

What are the benefits of having smoke-free housing? (Check all that apply)

- a. Reduced risk of fire
- b. Positive impact on residents' health
- c. Improved indoor air quality
- d. Reduced staff time to manage building
- e. Reduced residents' complaints
- f. Reduce residents turn-over
- g. Reduced rehabilitation cost for smoking units
- h. Unsure
- i. Other, please specify

**Question 15:**

What are the major obstacles to implementing a smoke-free policy in public housing units? (Check all that apply)

- a. Residents' complaints
- b. Enforcement
- c. Management
- d. Resistance from the Board
- e. Difficult filling vacant units
- f. Concern over legality of policy
- g. Unsure
- h. Other, please specify

**Question 16:**

Would you like to receive more information on how to implement a smoke-free policy?

**Question 17:**

If you have a smoke-free policy for your public housing units, would you be willing to share it with us?

**Question 18:**

Additional Comments



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