

Making the Business Case for Prevention: Smoke-free Multiunit Housing

[Patrick Lee] We are always, as developers, looking for a marketing edge. And that marketing edge will transfer into our properties getting leased up sooner.

[Laurie McGrath] We've consistently in the housing industry found that residents have asked when we could ever go smoke-free.

[Kate Bennett] We were getting weekly transfer requests from residents who were trying to get away from secondhand smoke.

[Meena Carr] Eighty-five percent of the residents agreed that we should go smoke-free.

[Washington Beech resident] It was awful. You could smell it as soon as you walk in the front door.

[Laurie McGrath] When you look at the economic benefits, you can see it from the resident perspective, from the building perspective, from the community perspective.

[Patrick Lee] We work in lots of communities that are predominantly low income. And then at the other end of the spectrum, we develop market-rate housing. You have very high-income people, and they too are choosing smoke-free housing. We decided that it would be a marketing advantage to offer a property that was smoke-free housing.

[Kate Bennett] What's been common across all of those projects is the degree to which smoking and secondhand smoke is impacting residents.

[Meena Carr] I am sort of responsible for Boston housing going smoke-free, which came about because my grandson was diagnosed with asthma.

[Kate Bennett] People's personal testimony was probably one of the most powerful things.

[Meena Carr] He started having these attacks when he would get up, and he say he cannot breathe. You know so that really, it got to me. I asked them if they could make it possible that the building be smoke-free.

[Laurie McGrath] Economically speaking, I think that smoke-free housing is a huge benefit.

[Patrick Lee] We all know that when an apartment has been occupied by a smoker there are all of the fumes that are within that unit.

[Laurie McGrath] The turnover cost to repaint is fairly high, and we see reduced costs in terms of HVAC systems, maintenance of HVAC systems.

[Kate Bennett] I've seen anywhere from \$600 to \$3,000 as a differential for turning over that unit.

[Laurie McGrath] The biggest cost savings that we've seen is insurance. Because, naturally, smoke-free housing we'd find a reduced insurance rate.

[Patrick Lee] It reduced the liabilities associated with fire hazards.

[Laurie McGrath] It's a cost savings that we can pass on to the residents. It's a cost savings that we can utilize within the building, those monies.

[Boston Public Housing resident] I was for the non-smoking from day one. Even though I was a smoker.

[Malik Carr] Once I'm away from the smoke, I don't have any asthma problems.

[Meena Carr] He hasn't had a serious attack that warranted us going to the hospital with him.

[Patrick Lee] It's a chance to support your residents so that they're in a better position to meet their lease commitments.

[Kate Bennett] We are just really trying to create healthier atmospheres inside the buildings and move the smoke out. The beauty of this is that it doesn't cost any money.

[Patrick Lee] It isn't as hard as you might imagine.

[Laurie McGrath] Smoke-free housing is a win-win for the community, for the property, for the residents.

[Patrick Lee] Yes, it's wonderful that it's been a financial benefit. Yes, it's wonderful that it has helped us market our properties more successfully. But healthier residents are part of our communities. That's the real, real benefit here.