



POSITION STATEMENT

Position Title:	Second-Hand Smoke in Multi-Unit Housing
Approved by:	Cynthia St. John, Chief Executive Officer Dr. Joyce Lock, Medical Officer of Health Board of Health for Oxford Elgin St. Thomas Health Unit
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Position of Southwestern Public Health

1. Southwestern Public Health supports both for-profit and not-for-profit landlords creating a smoke-free multi-unit housing policy to protect the health of tenants.
2. No amount of second-hand smoke exposure is safe. Breathing in any amount of cannabis or tobacco smoke can negatively impact health. Furthermore, cannabis and tobacco smoke have been shown to have many of the same toxic chemicals.
3. There is a dose-response relationship with exposure to second-hand smoke. The more exposure one has, the greater damage is done to one's health. Second-hand smoke is more concentrated in enclosed settings such as homes and vehicles.
4. Drifting second-hand smoke is an environmental carcinogen that travels through ventilation systems, underneath doors, through window cracks and by other means.
5. Children have higher breathing rates than adults and are subsequently more vulnerable to the effects of second-hand smoke exposure, particularly in enclosed settings.
6. Regular exposure to drifting second-hand smoke, particularly in enclosed settings such as multi-unit housing, can lead to chronic diseases such as lung cancer, heart disease and even death.
7. Third-hand smoke which is the residual gases, chemicals and heavy metals that remain long after a cigarette is extinguished can produce off-gassing for weeks, or even months after vacancy and is now understood to be a public health hazard. Third-hand smoke like second-hand smoke is of concern for young children, especially when exposed long-term.
8. There is increasing public demand for smoke-free housing in the province of Ontario and within Southwestern Ontario.
9. Residents of low-income housing do not have the same options as mid-to-high income earners to live in housing free from exposure to second-hand and third-hand smoke. This disparity must be addressed by increasing the availability of

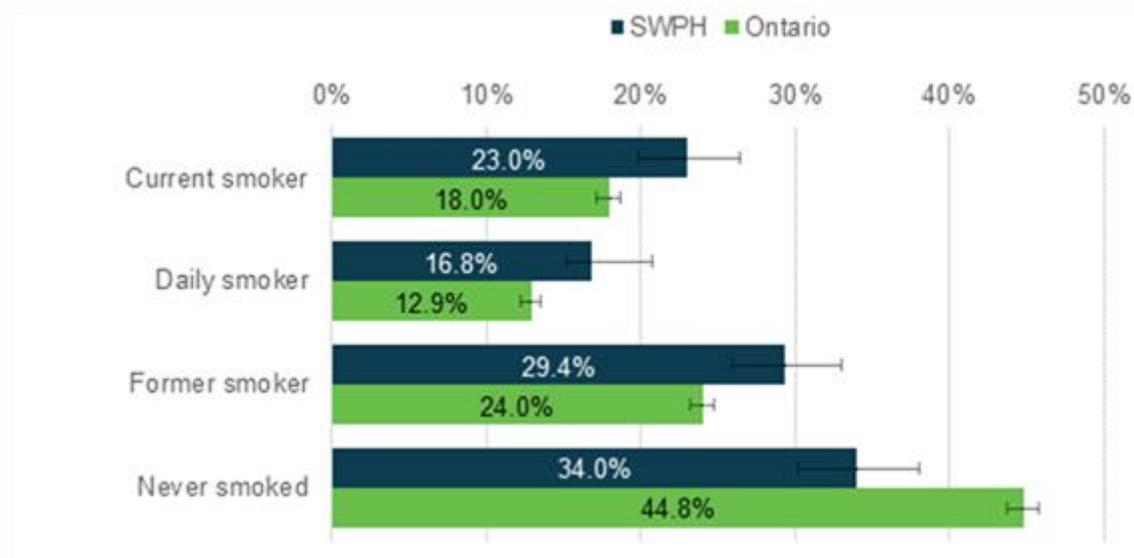
smoke-free housing.

Rationale:

Smoking Prevalence

From 2015-2016, there were higher proportions of adults who were current smokers (daily and occasional), daily smokers and former smokers in the SWPH region compared to Ontario (Figure 1). About one-third (34.0%) of adults living in the SWPH region completely abstained from smoking cigarettes in their lifetime compared to 44.8% of adults in Ontario.¹

Figure 1. Age-standardized smoking status, adults 20 years and older, Southwestern Public Health and Ontario, 2015-2016¹



Health Effects

Second-hand smoke contains over 4000 chemicals, over 70 of which are known to cause cancer.² Scientific evidence indicates there is no risk-free level of exposure to second-hand smoke and breathing any amount can be harmful to health.² Non-smokers who are regularly exposed to second-hand smoke have a higher risk of getting lung cancer, heart disease as well as other types of cancer.² While a number of multi-unit residents take precautions to ensure second-hand smoke does not seep into their units, it cannot be fully controlled by ventilation or air duct cleaning.³ In June 2005, the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air Conditioning Engineers stated that, “the only means to effectively eliminate health risks associated with indoor exposure [to second-hand smoke] is to ban smoking activity”.³

Data from the Ontario Tobacco Research Unit about third-hand smoke (gases, chemicals and heavy metals that persist after a cigarette is extinguished) indicates that off-gassing of toxic substances can occur for weeks and even months after a cigarette is extinguished. Some of these substances are carcinogenic or otherwise toxic for human

health. This presents a health risk for people exposed to third-hand smoke, especially small children who are physiologically vulnerable and may be directly exposed through contact with contaminated surfaces such as carpets, upholstery and clothing⁴.

Statistics Canada reports that having a low income is associated with having more chronic health conditions [including those precipitated by smoking] than individuals with a higher income⁵. The social determinants of health explain that individuals and families with less education and subsequently less income are more likely to suffer from poor health and engage in unhealthy behaviours such as smoking which may lead to exposure to second-hand smoke, than those with a higher income and education.

Since families and tenants living in multi-unit housing, particularly those living in geared-to-income housing, are more likely to have a low household income and lower level of education than families living in single homes, they are already at increased risk for chronic health conditions.⁵ Residents of multi-unit housing, particularly young children, do not have the choice or ability to remove 100% of drifting second-hand smoke from their unit/home, unless they are able to move out. Due to financial circumstances, moving out is often not an option. Implementing smoke-free policies in affordable and community housing addresses health inequalities that tenants may face from disproportionate second-hand smoke exposure and limited options for housing that is affordable and safe.⁵

Public Support

Evidence from survey data suggests that there is strong support for smoke-free housing and that 80% of tenants, if given the choice, would choose smoke-free housing.⁸ In 2018, Public Health conducted a smoke-free housing survey of all social housing units owned and operated by Oxford County. The results from the survey indicated that 51.9% of those who responded to the survey indicated they wanted some parts of their housing community to be smoke-free, 34.7% did not want their housing community to be smoke-free and 13.4% did not know whether they wanted their housing community to be smoke-free.¹

The Region of Waterloo Public Health conducted a post implementation smoke-free housing policy survey which indicated tenants of Waterloo Region Housing often did not complain even when they were affected by second-hand smoke because they did not want to create conflict with neighbouring tenants⁶. This indicates the extent of the negative effects of exposure to second-hand and third-hand cannot be determined solely based on the number of complaints received.

Safety and Fire Risk

According to the Office of the Ontario Fire Marshall, cigarettes, pipes and cigars are the leading sources of ignition in fatal residential fires in Ontario. From 1998 to 2007, cigarettes were responsible for almost 600 fires per year, and over one quarter (29%) of all fire deaths. Data from the St. Thomas Fire Department indicates that 6 fires in 2015, 4 fires in 2016 and 7 fires in 2017 were caused by smoking materials. Multi-unit housing that become 100% smoke-free can reduce their risk of fire and be a safer place for people, non-smokers and smokers alike to live⁷.

Cost

Smoke-free housing policies can have economic benefits. Landlords typically report that it cost two to three times more to turn over a smoking unit versus a non-smoking unit. Items such as sanding and cleaning to remove tar and nicotine, stain killer primer, and extra paint contribute to these costs. Annual economic savings from prohibiting smoking in all U.S. community-based public housing were estimated at \$521 million per year, including \$341 million in second-hand smoke related health care expenditures, \$108 million in renovation expenses and \$72 million in smoking-attributable fire losses.⁸

The Rights Debate

There is no inherent “right to smoke” anywhere in Canadian law. Second-hand smoke has been identified as a breach of the covenant of reasonable enjoyment at the Ontario Landlord and Tenant Board. There have been multiple cases at the landlord tenant board where tenants have been evicted for smoking by affecting someone else’s reasonable enjoyment of their rental space. It is important to note that smoke-free housing policies do not prohibit smokers from renting or buying accommodation, do not mean people will be evicted for simply being smokers, and do not force people to quit smoking.⁹

Gaining Momentum in other Jurisdictions

In recent years, more and more municipalities have acknowledged the implications of drifting second-hand smoke and have subsequently begun to pass smoke-free indoor policies. As of December 2016, 26 Ontario municipal providers of community housing have adopted, or are in the process of adopting, smoke-free policies.⁵ Leading private sector property managers and landlords such as Realstar, Skyline Living, and Drewlo Holdings have also implemented smoke-free policies. The table below includes a sample of some of the municipalities that have passed smoke-free policies. For a list of municipalities that have implemented smoke-free housing policies, please visit <http://www.smokefreehousingon.ca/sfho/directory.html>.

Municipality	
Haliburton Community Housing Corporation	Kingston & Frontenac Housing Corporation
South Chatham Village Apartments	District of Timiskaming Social Services
Spruce Lodge Non-Profit Housing, Stratford	Millbrook non-profit Housing
Waterloo Region Housing	Durham Region Non-Profit housing
Bruce County Housing Corporation	Nepean Housing Corporation
County of Lambton Housing Services Department	Port Hope Housing Corporation
Grey County and Owen Sound Housing Corporations	District of Thunder Bay Housing
Ottawa Community Housing	City of Timmins

Huron County Housing	Region of Niagara Housing
Simcoe County Housing	Windsor Essex Community Housing
Barrie Municipal Non-Profit Housing	Durham Region Non-Profit housing
Hastings Local Housing Corporation	County of Wellington Housing
Cambridge Non-Profit Housing Corporation	Kingston & Frontenac Housing Corporation
Chatham-Kent Housing	District of Timiskaming Social Services
Huron County Housing Corporation	Millbrook non-profit Housing
County of Northumberland Housing	City of St. Thomas Social Housing

Implications for Southwestern Public Health:

Southwestern Public Health will:

1. Include cautionary messages to the public regarding the harms associated with second-hand smoke exposure in multi-unit housing.
2. Continue to evaluate new research as it becomes available and review the organization's position on smoke-free multi-unit housing as necessary.
3. Support and advocate for municipally owned social housing, other social housing providers, supportive housing providers, and private landlords in developing and implementing smoke-free housing policies in Elgin County - St. Thomas, and Oxford County.
4. Southwestern Public Health will work with housing providers to create and implement policies that protect the health of residents.
5. Respond to complaints received by the public on drifting second-hand smoke exposure in multi-unit housing. Will provide both tenants and landlords with relevant information and suggestions to improve or amend the health and safety concerns.
6. Work with community and public health partners such as the South West Tobacco Control Area Network to educate about smoke-free housing and advocate for smoke-free housing.

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