

CDC'S DIVISION OF COMMUNITY HEALTH SUCCESS STORIES

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Travis County, Texas: Patience and Persistence Bring Protection

SUMMARY

Travis County, Texas has a population of over 1 million people and 7,000 employees. On January 29, 2013, the Commissioners Court voted unanimously to approve a facilities policy to prohibit all forms of tobacco on County property. The Health & Human Services and Veterans Services Department was integral in continuing to see this healthy change come to fruition. Through research, technical assistance from partner organizations, surveying, and listening to the community, they were able to protect 100% of their constituents and employees.



CHALLENGE

Travis County's Health & Human Services and Veterans Services Department staff worked tirelessly for nearly two years on a Tobacco-free Workplace policy for the County.

Despite thorough research and technical assistance from Austin/Travis County Health & Human Services Department and Austin Travis County Integral Care, the local Mental Health/Mental Retardation provider who recently adopted a similar policy, the first year's visits to Commissioners Court resulted in more questions to be answered, which further delayed a vote.

The Court posed legal questions and technical questions, which were primarily a confusion of the City of Austin's Smoking in Public Places ordinance. One major concern was whether employees with worksites outdoors (i.e. construction crews) would be included in this policy.

YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

By providing best practice research, listening to community partners who have already implemented similar changes, and hearing from employees and the community, Travis County was able to learn and create a stronger, comprehensive policy. Whether its understanding what issues are being presented or providing feedback at a meeting, it's important to stay involved with your local government to help shape your community.

SOLUTION

County staff conducted 25 presentations to over 400 staff discussing the rationale for a tobacco-free policy. Staff was also given the opportunity to complete a survey, which revealed that 72% of employees supported the policy and, of employees using tobacco, 77% had tried to quit. At Commissioners Court, everyone was invited to express their opinions. The comments eased the minds of the Commissioners that the information had reached those who would be impacted by this policy. The County also organized their Employee Wellness Program to include resources for those interested in quitting.

RESULTS

On January 29, 2013, the Commissioners Court approved a tobacco-free workplace policy on all County property. The policy will go into effect on April 7, 2013, which falls on World Health Day and during Public Health Week. The policy includes all forms of tobacco, including electronic cigarettes, on County owned or leased property, as well as in owned or leased County vehicles and private vehicles on County property. All Travis County employees, including those with outside worksites, subcontractors, and visitors must comply with this policy.

The Employee Wellness program allows any County employee and covered dependents to visit any of the three County clinics and receive a physician tobacco cessation consultation with no co-pay and a prescription for pharmacotherapy with no co-pay to assist in quitting tobacco.

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FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Travis County is dedicated to promoting a tobacco-free environment. They are currently working on developing a cessation classroom course to compliment the pharmacotherapy treatment to follow best practices. They will continue to follow-up with feedback after the policy is implemented and can now serve as a model to neighboring counties and cities interested in protecting their employees and constituents.