



Colusa County & City of Williams General Plans Prioritize Health

INTRODUCTION

In June 2020, the Colusa County Board of Supervisors added language to promote smokefree multi-unit housing (MUH) to the Housing Element in the county’s General Plan. Inspired by this update, city planners in Williams followed suit and added the language to their city’s General Plan in October 2020. Although a general plan is not a substitute for legislated policy, it does serve as a blueprint, a guide that reveals constituents’ vision for their community to their elected officials.

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

Colusa County Tobacco Education Program (TEP) staff have had difficulty passing a smokefree MUH policy because many decision makers in the county believe landlords are responsible for enforcing smokefree rules, not the local government. Knowing that Colusa County was due to update the Housing Element of its General Plan, TEP staff saw a unique opportunity to get smokefree MUH on the table. As public health advocates, TEP staff was new to working on general plans. One of the greatest challenges was developing a common language to communicate with planners while advocating for smokefree MUH. TEP staff had to practice patience, yet persevere with planners through a lengthy process to ensure tobacco control language made it into the final draft. The time and effort that went into learning about the planning field and building partnerships with the planners was key.



STAND-OUT MOMENT

When the time came for the supervisors to vote on the resolution to pass the Housing Element update, COVID-19 cases were spiking in the county. Naturally, the meeting shifted focus to the status of COVID-19, but coalition members were able to call in and voice their support for the tobacco control language. Hearing from community members cemented the approval of the final language.

The learning curve can be steep but working on general plans may be worth the effort for advocates who have had various setbacks with tobacco control policy. The language used in general plans may even pave the way for legislative policies.