



Promising Practices

Addressing Health Inequities in LGBTQ Communities: Implementing Tobacco-Free Policies at Minnesota Pride Events

Through their Health Equity in Prevention (HEiP) initiative, the Center for Prevention at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota (Blue Cross) awarded contracts to 13 organizations working to implement policy, systems, and environmental changes to support health and advance health equity. The Promising Practices series highlights successful strategies used by these organizations and important lessons learned that can be used by other organizations to inform their work. The series also serves as a reference for other funders interested in supporting effective strategies to promote health.

What are the rates of smoking in Minnesota's LGBTQ communities?

Since 2012, Rainbow Health Initiative has administered its annual [Voices of Health survey](#) at Pride events around the state and online. These events celebrate LGBTQ culture and identities and bring attention to civil rights and policy issues that impact LGBTQ communities. Over the years, the survey data have brought attention to key health disparities impacting LGBTQ communities, such as access to health care, health insurance coverage, and health behaviors, including tobacco use. In 2014, over half of LGBTQ respondents (57%) reported smoking at least 100 cigarettes or five packs in their lifetime and were almost twice as likely to report smoking every day or some days compared to the general Minnesota population (25% and 14%, respectively).

What is Rainbow Health Initiative (RHI)?

RHI is a nonprofit focused on advancing the health and wellness of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) communities through research, education, and advocacy. For more information, visit: <http://www.rainbowhealth.org/>

What is the impact of the tobacco industry's focus on LGBTQ individuals?

In the early 1990s, the tobacco industry began focusing on LGBTQ communities in an attempt to attract additional consumers to their products. The industry engaged in targeted advertising, community outreach, and sponsorship of organizations and events (Smith & Malone, 2003). This focus continued into the 2000s with companies creating ads that were meant to convey a message of solidarity and support for LGBTQ individuals (National LGBT Tobacco Control Network, 2015).

Research suggests that LGBTQ organizations and individuals may not readily see the impact of tobacco industry targeting and the influence of tobacco on the health of LGBTQ communities. In one national study, researchers interviewed representatives of 74 LGBTQ organizations and found that most saw tobacco use as an individual choice and not an issue that influences the collective health of the LGBTQ population. These organizations were also hesitant to implement or support tobacco control policies for fear of alienating supporters or being viewed as policing behavior (Offen, Smith, & Malone, 2008). Focus groups conducted with LGBTQ individuals from four U.S. cities demonstrated that some individuals saw the tobacco industry's targeted marketing in a positive light, affirming the community's consumer power, and did not feel that rates of tobacco use in LGBTQ communities were significantly high or disproportionate from the overall population (Smith, Thomson, Offen, & Malone, 2008).

Similar results were found through a 2004 statewide household survey of California's LGBTQ population. The survey revealed that less than one-third (31%) of respondents were aware that tobacco companies target LGBTQ communities through their advertising. In addition, most respondents (70-80%) did not feel that smoking was a bigger problem for LGBTQ individuals compared to the general population (Field Research Corporation, 2004).

Why concentrate on eliminating tobacco use and industry sponsorship at Pride events?

Pride events take place annually across multiple Minnesota cities and attract hundreds of thousands of people. Because of their popularity, Pride events offer the opportunity to counter the influence of tobacco sponsorship and advertising, along with providing education and awareness of tobacco's effect on health.

Increasingly, Pride events in major cities across the country are becoming completely tobacco-free or creating tobacco-free spaces, including events in Houston, San Francisco, Santa Cruz, Reading, Lancaster, Seattle, Phoenix, Minneapolis and Saint Paul. Events are also forging valuable connections with tobacco control and cessation organizations by inviting them to host booths and distribute information. For example, the Ohio Tobacco Quitline was a key sponsor for Pride events in Columbus (LGBT HealthLink, 2015).

How are tobacco-free policies implemented?

Anyone can take the initiative to advocate for a tobacco-free policy. However, RHI recommends starting with some key, initial steps to help lay the foundation for policy change:

- Form connections with the key leaders who manage or administer Pride events and take time to listen to their questions and thoughts.
- Look into recent research, literature, articles, and data about tobacco control or policies and the impact of smoking on LGBTQ communities.
- Think about why you are personally invested in tobacco control work and be ready to share this story with others.
- Know the facts and develop responses and key talking points ahead of time to help you respond to challenges regarding your ideas.

In addition to these steps, it is important to assess community support for tobacco control by gathering the opinions of friends and colleagues, talking with advocates who have engaged in similar policy efforts, or developing listening sessions or a survey to gauge community members' thoughts about tobacco control.

Implementing a tobacco-free sponsorship policy at Twin Cities Pride

In 2012, with the help of RHI, Twin Cities Pride (TCP), the largest Pride event in the state of Minnesota, established a Tobacco-Free Sponsorship Policy. The work leading up to this policy started in 2008, when RHI formed connections with the leaders of TCP and worked with other organizations to carve out tobacco-free spaces at the event. Similarly, in 2010, the Minneapolis Park Board passed a Tobacco-Free Parks Policy which effectively made Pride a

What is a tobacco-free policy?

A tobacco-free policy should clearly articulate an organization or group's commitment to addressing tobacco use and sponsorship. It can include any or all of the following aspects:

- Not accepting donations or sponsorship from companies or organizations that primarily produce or sell tobacco products.
- Not allowing the distribution of free samples or coupons for tobacco products.
- Not allowing the advertising of tobacco products at events or facilities.
- Providing a tobacco-free event or facility.

Tobacco-free policies can have several positive effects, including: reducing secondhand smoke exposure, stemming cigarette litter which pollutes the environment, and shifting community norms around tobacco use by signaling that smoking is not a core behavior of LGBTQ communities. Policies can also curtail tobacco companies marketing and advertising.

comprehensive smoke-free event, as it is hosted in a Minneapolis park. To help enforce the parks policy, RHI created tobacco-free event signs which were placed around the Pride event. While the parks policy restricted tobacco use at the event, tobacco advertising was still present because TCP did not have a policy regarding tobacco sponsorship. In March 2012, RHI staff met with the TCP board and provided information on the health impacts of secondhand smoke, tobacco-related health disparities in LGBTQ communities and communities of color, and the tobacco industry's focus on LGBTQ communities in the Twin Cities. Staff also presented a sample policy that could be used as a model for TCP. The board was receptive to the information and adopted a Tobacco-Free Sponsorship Policy in April 2012.

The information in this section was adapted from RHI's [The Industry does not own us: A guide to influencing private policy](#).

What has been the reach of tobacco-free policies?

In addition to Twin Cities Pride, RHI also worked with Fargo-Moorhead Pride, St. Cloud Pride, East Central Minnesota Pride, Twin Cities Youth Pride, Anoka LGBTQ Youth Pride, and South Central Minnesota Pride to help them adopt and sustain policies. After a few years of RHI laying the groundwork for a policy, a group of ClearWay Minnesota LAAMMP (Leadership and Advocacy Institute to Advance Minnesota's Parity for Priority Population) fellows and local Duluth community members succeeded in passing a policy at Duluth Pride as well. In total, nine Pride events across Minnesota have adopted tobacco-free policies, which reached a total of 530,000 attendees in 2015.

More recently, RHI expanded these efforts to work with Pride event organizers to eliminate tobacco sponsorships, marketing, and advertising.

What lessons has RHI learned through its work?

RHI identified the following lessons learned when implementing and sustaining tobacco-free policies:

- **Respond directly to concerns about personal freedom.** Some LGBTQ individuals associate smoking with freedom or liberation and are wary of tobacco control policies or initiatives. RHI addresses this by highlighting how tobacco companies donate to anti-LGBTQ politicians and use advertising to target and exploit LGBTQ people. RHI also addresses misconceptions by underscoring the negative environmental and health effects of tobacco.
- **Communicate regularly with organizers of Pride events throughout the year.** Pride events in greater Minnesota are often organized and administered by volunteer committees or boards that can experience high turnover every year. This lack of continuity can make it difficult to stay connected to organizers and ensure that tobacco-free policies are correctly implemented and enforced. RHI makes it a priority for staff to develop connections to event organizers and periodically check in with each group throughout the year.
- **Maintain connections to Pride events.** RHI recognizes the importance of supporting the organizers of Pride events and attending events throughout the state. Being present at the events demonstrates RHI's commitment and engagement to tobacco control work and LGBTQ health. To help with policy enforcement, RHI provides tobacco-free signs that can be placed throughout Pride events. Staff at RHI also emphasize that it is important to visit communities during times outside of Pride.
- **Offer an incentive for policy work.** RHI gives an annual policy award and financial sponsorship to Pride events that have passed tobacco-free policies. This award is important to publicly acknowledging and honoring the work of Pride events, while also providing needed financial support to the events. In addition to monetary incentives, donations of time and talent are also helpful to building relationships and having conversations about the importance of policy changes.
- **Share key information with Pride events.** RHI annually administers its Voices of Health survey at Minnesota's Pride events and shares the data with the event organizers. It is important that organizations exchange key information related to LGBTQ research, advocacy, and policy with Pride event organizers.

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Additional resources

- Rainbow Health Initiative. (2013). *The Industry does not own us: A guide to influencing private policy*. Access at: <http://www.rainbowhealth.org/files/2213/7098/6840/TobaccoFreePolicyGuide2013.pdf>
- Rainbow Health Initiative. (2014). *Voices of Health Survey*. Access at: <http://www.rainbowhealth.org/resources-for-you/research-and-publications/>

Wilder Research

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451 Lexington Parkway North
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55104
651-280-2700
www.wilderresearch.org



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For more information

Rainbow Health Initiative: Joann Usher | 612-206-3180 | joann.usher@rainbowhealth.org

Wilder Research: Nick Stuber | 651-280-2763 | nick.stuber@wilder.org

Prepared by Wilder Research on behalf of the Center for Prevention at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota.