

ISSUE REPORT

Investing In America's Health:

A STATE-BY-STATE LOOK AT PUBLIC HEALTH
FUNDING AND KEY HEALTH FACTS



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PREVENTION IN ACTION

Smoke-Free Environments: Helping Bostonians Breathe Easier at Home, Work and Play

By Lisa Conley, Director of Intergovernmental Relations & Public Health Advocacy, Boston Public Health Commission

In 2004, Boston was one of the first cities in the nation to ban smoking in the workplace, a decision that Mayor Menino calls one of the toughest fights of his career. “I remember we announced that policy on Valentine’s Day at Doyle’s Pub in Jamaica Plain,” the Mayor recalls fondly, “I love Doyle’s, but I wasn’t sure I was going to get out of there alive that day. I did, but I didn’t go back for a few months.” What was a controversial policy in 2004 is now understood to be one of the most effective public health interventions in the last decade.

Now, Boston is again on the cutting edge of tobacco prevention, thanks to the leadership of the Mayor and an infusion of federal funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) Communities Putting Prevention to Work Program. The Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC) received \$6.1 million to reduce Boston residents use and exposure to tobacco. Over the past two years, this funding has been used to support a robust campaign to implement smoke-free policies throughout the city, including in public and private housing, on hospital campuses and on all public school properties.

In 2010, BPHC, in partnership with private developers and city development agencies, set out to create 1,000 new smoke-free housing units by providing technical assistance, free advertising and other incentives to building owners. The city has now far-exceeded its goal, with over 4,000 units logged in the last two years. In addition, the Boston Housing Authority will convert its 12,000 units to be smoke-free, improv-

ing indoor air quality for the housing authority’s 27,000 residents and 900 employees.

Beyond indoor air policies, the city has implemented policies to improve outdoor air quality in targeted environments. This past summer, the Parks Department posted No Smoking signs at all 135 city-owned playgrounds, urging parents and park users to think twice before lighting up around young children.

And this fall, the Mayor stood with the city’s teaching hospitals to announce a plan to make city hospital campuses smoke free. When fully implemented in April 2012, these policies will eliminate secondhand smoke exposure during over 5 million patient visits and for over 50,000 employees. “Hospitals are places where sick people go for healing,” said Dr. Paula A. Johnson, a cardiologist who is executive director of the Connors Center for Women’s Health and Gender Biology at Brigham and Women’s Hospital, and chair of the Boston Public Health Commission’s Board of Health. “It is critically important that hospitals create environments — not only inside the walls of the institutions, but also on their doorsteps — that promote good health.”

The city followed up the hospital announcement with a vote of the Boston School Committee, in January 2012, which passed a comprehensive tobacco and nicotine free policy in all public schools. The policy includes a tobacco free buffer zone of 50 feet around school property and additional enforcement and signage. This policy protects 56,000 students and 9,000 staff at 135 schools.