



SMOKE-FREE NEW ORLEANS

Million Hearts in Action

[Strategies for Achieving Million Hearts Goals]



On Jan. 22, 2015, the New Orleans City Council passed an ordinance expanding the Louisiana Smoke-Free Air Act to prohibit tobacco use in the two business categories previously exempted: bars and casinos. The new law encouraged many smokers to quit or cut back. It also drastically improved the health for thousands of bar and casino workers – and millions of annual tourists – previously exposed to harmful secondhand smoke.

[Fast Facts]

- Smoking is the second leading risk factor for death in the nation. Furthermore, almost one-third of coronary heart disease deaths are attributed to smoking and secondhand smoke exposure.
- Secondhand smoke also contributes to heart disease, stroke, respiratory illnesses and other potentially deadly illnesses.
- Current smokers have a 2-4 times increased risk of stroke compared with nonsmokers or those who have quit for more than 10 years.
- Smoking was responsible for more than 480,000 premature deaths in the United States annually from 2005-2009 among people 35 years or older. Furthermore, almost one third of deaths of CHD are attributable to smoking and secondhand smoke exposure.
- Each year from 2005 to 2009, an estimated 41000 US deaths were attributable to exposure to secondhand smoke among those ≥ 35 years of age.⁴
- The 2006 smoke-free law passed by the Louisiana legislature lifted a restriction that prevented local governments from adding stricter laws of their own.
- The percentage of current cigarette smokers (16.9%) declined 30% since 1998 (24.1%)
- Nearly one-quarter, 24 percent, of adults in Louisiana smoke, compared to the 17 percent of all American adults who do.



They're still holding up and their doors are still open. I think so many expected the sky to fall but it did not. They're still there."

– Tonia Moore, associate director of the Louisiana Public Health Institute, on New Orleans casino and bars who argued the ban would be bad for business

[What We Did]

- Backed by a groundswell of community support, the New Orleans City Council gave unanimous approval (7-0) to a comprehensive smoking ban that included bars and casinos for the first time. The measure went into effect on April 22, 2015, 90 days after its passage.
- Supporters of the smoke-free New Orleans effort convened a broad alliance of community members, including local musicians; various religious, business and civil rights groups; city council members who had championed the ban for years; and a large coalition of health advocates, including the American Heart Association (AHA) and the American Cancer Society.
- Putting their celebrity status to use, nationally acclaimed, New Orleans-based musicians became key advocates in the anti-tobacco campaign. They testified at public hearings about having to work in smoky nightclubs and described mourning the losses of musician friends who died from tobacco-related illnesses.
- People with the most to gain from smoke-free laws shared how much they've already lost: A former casino worker testified about developing lung cancer despite being a nonsmoker. He also spoke about losing his job after missing too many workdays because of his medical treatment.

[What We Accomplished]

- The smoke-free ordinance extended protection to approximately 5,000 New Orleans bar and casino employees previously left vulnerable under Louisiana's smoke-free law.
- The smoke-free ordinance also shields more than nine million tourists who visit New Orleans, and its famed French Quarter nightclubs, every year.
- Behavior and attitudes about tobacco use changed: Support for the local ordinance increased significantly six months after the law was enacted. According to one survey, support for the ban among New Orleans voters increased from 66 percent in December 2014, to 78 percent in October 2015, mainly because residents got to experience firsthand the benefits of living in a smoke-free environment.
- Indoor air pollution levels in bars and the city's casino plunged dramatically within months after ordinance took effect. Fine particle air pollution fell 96 percent in bars that previously allowed smoking, and was virtually eliminated in the city's casino, where it dropped by 99 percent, according to one report.

[What We Learned]

- Scientific studies can help combat anti-smoking opposition, which came mainly from the tobacco industry, restaurant and bar owners, and Harrah's, the owner of the New Orleans casino. Opponents argued that smoke-free laws would drastically cut into revenues. But numerous studies cited by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention determined that smoke-free regulations do not hurt hospitality businesses economically.
- Many casino workers interested in supporting smoke-free laws or sharing personal stories about how secondhand smoke affected their lives reluctantly did so. Most feared repercussions from their employer and felt like they were choosing between their job and their health unless allowed to share their stories anonymously or through measures shielding their identity from the general public.
- Cultural and behavior changes are difficult, so start easy and early. Coalition partners hosted smoke-free happy hours and bar nights to help ease business owners, and their customers, into the proper mindset about living in a smoke-free environment.

[What We Are Doing Now]

New studies have shown that smoke-free laws may be more effective at reducing smoking rates than raising taxes. Such reports often provide inspiration to communities interested in adopting a smoke-free ordinance similar to the one passed in New Orleans. About 800 municipalities throughout the country have laws banning smoking in workplaces, restaurants and bars, according to the American Nonsmokers' Rights Foundation, a nonprofit organization that opposes smoking. The AHA would like to see that number multiply.