

STORY FROM THE FIELD

Iron County Health Department – Hurley, WI

Population Served: 7,000

“My dad has smoked for as long as I can remember. Most of his family also smokes and some have had health problems because of it,” says one student of Iron County’s anti-tobacco youth organization, Fighting against Corporate Tobacco (FACT).

“The most important thing being in FACT has taught me is to stand up for what you believe in,” says another student.

And stand up these students have. With support and guidance from the Iron County Health Department, the youth here have received headline coverage in local papers. They have successfully asked local government to enact smoke-free policies in public buildings. They have stood outside in 15°F weather holding placards for the Great American Smokeout. They have volunteered to help law enforcement conduct compliance checks to ensure that businesses were refusing to sell tobacco to minors; as a result of these checks, many bar owners have removed cigarette machines from their businesses. They have met with their state legislators. They have designed statewide campaigns. One young woman traveled to India to help Indian students fight tobacco corporations’ global targeting of youth.

FAST FACT

A NACCHO survey found that in the first six months of 2009, 47 percent of LHDs across the country laid off staff or lost staff through attrition and were unable to replace them due to budget limitations. Moreover, 22 percent of LHDs had to cut hours or place staff on mandatory furlough.

Their work has contributed to startling state trends. Working through local health departments (LHDs), the state of Wisconsin reduced youth tobacco consumption by 65 percent over the course of seven years.

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National Association of County & City Health Officials

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- Zona Wick, Health Director

However, funding for this successful program was cut drastically as of July 1, 2009. The position for the part-time coordinator of the FACT group was cut entirely. At the same time, funding cuts may limit the ability of LHDs to capitalize on opportunities to work with the Food and Drug Administration, which was recently granted regulatory authority over tobacco products.

“The problem doesn’t go away just because the program goes away,” says health director, Zona Wick. “I need that coordinator to help people improve the health of this community. There is work that has to be done at a local level.”

“Tobacco is the number one cause of death and disease,” agrees Karen Hagemann, who was the coordinator before funding was cut. “The tobacco industry spends a huge amount of money each year trying to promote tobacco use. We can make a difference with a lot less than they spend.”

“Ninety percent of all smokers start before they are 18,” says Hagemann. “We can stop this addiction before it starts.”

NACCHO is the national organization representing local health departments. NACCHO supports efforts that protect and improve the health of all people and all communities by promoting national policy, developing resources and programs, seeking health equity, and supporting effective local public health practice and systems.

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