



Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

{Public Health}

All Americans deserve a strong public health system that is capable of protecting and promoting their health. All individuals and families should have quality public health services that protect, promote and preserve their health, regardless of who they are or where they live.

To realize these goals, America's public health system must be strengthened to: 1) provide people with the information and conditions they need to make healthier choices and live healthier lives; and 2) protect people from health threats beyond their control, such as infectious disease outbreaks, environmental toxins, natural disasters and bioterrorism. Achieving this vision will require the combined efforts of government at all levels, including state and local public health agencies, businesses, faith- and community-based groups and citizens.

Strengthening our public health system requires quality improvement through efforts such as accreditation of public health departments. In turn, quality improvement efforts must be driven by evidence of what works, and supported by public and institutional policies to improve and protect the health of all Americans.

Public policy interventions, such as creating smoke-free public places, have a direct and dramatic impact on improving health. Across the United States there has been a surge in the number of laws that require workplaces and public places to be smoke-free. Twenty-two states, Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico, and thousands of municipalities have enacted smoke-free laws that cover all workplaces, including restaurants and bars.

The Foundation is proud of its role in helping Americans breathe easier. Over the past decade, we played a major role in advocacy and public education campaigns in states and cities that have gone smoke-free. For example, in New Jersey and Philadelphia, our efforts helped to ensure a smooth transition for businesses, government and the public when the law took effect. A new Web-based resource, www.goingsmokefree.org was launched by the Foundation and its partners in 2007 to help communities learn how to promote and reap the health and economic benefits of smoke-free air.



The Foundation has an ambitious goal—to ensure that at least 75 percent of people in the United States are protected by smoke-free air laws by 2015. Approximately 46 percent of Americans are protected now (52.5 percent will be covered in 2009 when all states that have passed laws go into effect), eclipsing our previous goal of 35 percent coverage.

Studies show that going smoke-free has myriad health benefits. A **study** published in the *British Medical Journal* found that hospital admissions for heart attacks in Helena, Mont., fell by 40 percent during a six-month period that the city's smoke-free law was in effect—from an average of 40 admissions during the same months in the years before the law—to a total of 24 admissions. Those results influenced Montana's passage of a comprehensive state law that will be in full effect—including bars and casinos—in 2009. In Pueblo, Colo., heart attack rates decreased by 27 percent after implementation of the city's smoke-free law. A **study** published in the *American Journal of Public Health* found that New York State's Smoke-Free Air Law resulted in 3,813 fewer hospital admissions for heart attacks in 2004, the year after the smoke-free law went into effect.

Comprehensive smoke-free policies in combination with higher tobacco prices and treatments to help smokers quit are proven strategies that save lives. Still, some populations continue to face a disproportionate burden from tobacco use and exposure. To address this disparity, we support community-based investments through our *Tobacco Policy Change* program to: promote clean indoor air in workplaces and other public places; reduce smoking rates in Indian Country and among other priority populations; gain access to smoking-cessation services for low-wage earners; and promote the benefits of tobacco tax increases in preventing smoking among young people. We will continue to push for smoke-free air laws and use our experience in tobacco control to advance other public policies that improve people's health.

And we will continue to drive quality improvements in our nation's public health system. This includes advancing efforts to help public health agencies improve the services they provide and increase accountability to the communities they serve; supporting advocacy for the resources that public health agencies need; strengthening public health leadership; and fostering collaboration among federal, state and local public health agencies and others integral to the public health system, such as businesses, health care providers, educational institutions, and faith- and community-based organizations. We will support these initiatives by building the evidence for effective public health policies and practice. We will continue to take on these tough challenges and stick with them to help all Americans live longer, healthier lives.

For additional information about our initiatives and objectives, visit www.rwjf.org/publichealth.

