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First-ever Survey of California's Latino Renters Shows High Rates of Exposure to Drifting Tobacco Smoke Despite Home Smoking Bans

Exposure Fuels Support for Smoke-free Apartment Buildings and Separate Smoking Sections

LOS ANGELES (September 21, 2006) – Despite 95 percent of Latino families banning smoking inside their apartments, the first-ever statewide survey of Latino renters showed high rates of exposure to drifting tobacco smoke, according to the “Latino Renters Survey: Attitudes about Secondhand Smoke in Apartments,” released by the Hispanic/Latino Tobacco Education Partnership and the American Lung Association of California’s Center for Tobacco Policy and Organizing. The survey also showed overwhelming support for smoke-free apartment buildings and separate smoking sections.

“The extensive and widespread exposure to drifting tobacco smoke documented in this survey is a call to action,” said Dr. Lourdes Báezconde-Garbanati, PhD, MPH, Director of the Hispanic/Latino Tobacco Education Partnership and faculty member at the Keck School of Medicine at the University of Southern California. “This is especially important since the California Air Resources Board recently designated secondhand smoke as a toxic air contaminant, and, even more recently, the U.S. Surgeon General’s Report stated unequivocally that there is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke.”

The Latino Renters Survey of 409 Latino adult renters in California showed that 63 percent of respondents have been exposed to secondhand smoke drifting into their apartment, compared to 46 percent of all renters in California. Furthermore, 95 percent of Latino renters banned smoking in their home.

“It is discouraging that while most Latinos are aware of the dangers of secondhand smoke and go to great lengths to protect their family from it, the majority of these renters are still exposed to this dangerous substance,” said Dr. Báezconde-Garbanati.

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California's homeownership rate is the second lowest in the nation, and only 42 percent of Latino families own their own home, according to the nonpartisan group the California Budget Project. A clear majority (60%) of Latino renters support separate smoking and non-smoking areas in multi-unit housing, 82 percent support a law requiring a section of apartments, patios and balconies to be smoke-free, and 35 percent said that they would prefer to live in buildings that are completely smoke-free, according to the survey. This would be similar to the way that hotels offer non-smoking floors. Nearly 90 percent of those interviewed said that protecting the health of children, giving non-smokers the right to breathe clean air, and preventing odors and messes were among the top reasons for desiring smoke-free housing.

“Based on this and other general market surveys, there is a clear demand for smoke-free multi-unit housing,” said Kimberly Weich Reusché, Director of the Center for Tobacco Policy and Organizing. “In addition, the increase in building maintenance and repair costs associated with smoking should make the choice for landlords clear: designate an entire building or specific sections as smoke-free.”

Numerous legal opinions and most organizations of landlords and managers agree that property owners have the right to designate sections of apartments or entire buildings as smoke-free. An informational sheet called “*Action Steps For Tenants And Landlords to Deal with Drifting Tobacco Smoke*” that provides information on establishing smoke-free multi-unit housing is available by visiting www.hlpartnership.org or www.californialung.org/thecenter.

“Nearly 9 in 10 of those surveyed reported that children lived in their building,” said Dr. Báezconde-Garbanati. “This is a serious public health problem that must be addressed in our state.”

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The California Hispanic/Latino Tobacco Education Partnership (H/LaTEP) is a funded program of the California Department of Health Services, Tobacco Control Section (CDHS/TCS) and is housed at the University of Southern California's Institute for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Research. The Partnership empowers Hispanic/Latino communities throughout the state by building leadership skills, advocating for the health of the Hispanic/Latino population and mobilizing this Hispanic/Latino community to support a tobacco-free California.

The Center for Tobacco Policy & Organizing is a statewide project of the American Lung Association of California funded by the California Department of Health Services, Tobacco Control Section. It assists local communities meet their policy objectives using community organizing strategies. The Center also provides policy information and analysis regarding significant tobacco control bills, tobacco industry campaign contributions, emerging issues like tobacco retailer licensing and smokefree multi-unit housing, and breaking news stories as they relate to current or future tobacco control policy.