

# **Bronx Community Conversations for Change** **Supporting Healthy Living in the Bronx**



## *Discussion Guide:*

### **A Conversation About Smoke-Free Housing**

## INTRODUCTION

Despite recent declines, the Bronx has one of the highest adult smoking rates in New York City. Tobacco use is associated with hundreds of health problems. Also, secondhand tobacco smoke can increase the risk of blood clots and lead to more frequent asthma attacks in asthmatic children. Meanwhile, there are many factors preventing Bronx residents from quitting smoking and living in a smoke-free environment. Stress, nicotine addiction, inability to move, lack of resources are the ones Bronxites point to all the time.

Communities need to find answers and take action on many different levels. The dialogue-to-change process brings all kinds of people together to share different views and experiences. In the process, they begin to build stronger relationships and work together to find solutions to address these concerns and improve our health. Community conversations are a chance for us to hear from each other and make a plan to create better, stronger, neighborhoods for our families and neighbors. By having community conversations, we can identify solutions to address these concerns and improve our health.

Our conversations will focus on making our communities:

- Safer
- Healthier
- More beautiful
- Neighborhood friendly

We'll think about ways to create opportunities for feeling good and staying healthy by creating more smoke-free housing. And it all starts with a conversation.

### Using this discussion guide

This guide is not meant just for reading; it's meant for you to use. We want to have these conversations so we can tell the story of neighbors and organizations working together to solve problems and strengthen their community.

Here's the basic outline of the discussion sessions in this guide:

- **Session One** gives participants in the group a chance to talk about their connections to the Bronx and hear about other people's experiences. Also, it will offer some different viewpoints about the state of health in the Bronx and the root challenges for smoke-free living/housing in the borough.
- **Session Two** is an opportunity to talk about possible approaches for supporting a smoke-free housing in the Bronx, come up with action ideas and think about which ones would work best for our community.

## SESSION 1: GETTING TO KNOW ONE ANOTHER & HEALTHY LIVING IN THE BRONX

### **PART 1: Getting to Know One Another – Who are we and what is our vision for a healthier Bronx? (50 minutes)**

#### ***Activity 1: Getting to Know One Another (10 minutes)***

Welcome everyone and thank you for joining us today. In this session, we will get to know one another, talk about what is important to us, and see how we want to work together. Then, we will discuss what other people are saying about health living in our community.

Let's go around the room and answer the following questions:

1. Who are you?
2. How long have you lived or worked in the Bronx?
3. Why did you come today?
4. What are your hopes for this effort?

#### ***Activity 2: Setting ground rules and designating roles/responsibilities (5 minutes)***

Creating some ground rules will help our discussion work well. Here are some ideas. Are there other rules that you would like to add?

1. Start on time. End on time.
2. Listen to one another. Treat each other with respect.
3. Each person gets a chance to talk.
4. Speak for yourself. Use "I" statements instead of trying to speak for your group.
5. One person talks at a time. Don't cut people off.
6. It's OK to disagree.
7. Stick to the issue.
8. If you talk about people who are not here, don't say their names.
9. Some of the things we talk about will be very personal. We will not tell these stories to other people, unless we all say it is OK. "What is said here, stays here."
10. Help the facilitator keep things on track.

Assigning specific roles for group members will make sure we get everything done that we want and everyone's voice is heard. Here are some ideas. Are we missing any?

1. Timekeeper
2. Note taker

***Activity 3: What is your connection to the issue? (15 minutes)***

1. Why is it important to talk about living a healthy lifestyle and smoke-free housing?
2. What worries you the most about this issue?
3. How has living or working in the Bronx affected your ability to be healthy? Tell us about your experience finding smoke-free apartment buildings.
4. Based on the discussion so far, what have you learned from others in this group?
5. What do we agree about? Where do we differ? Why?

***Activity 4: Visioning Exercise - What Are Our Hopes for a Healthier Bronx? (20 minutes)***

A "Vision" is an image of what we hope for the future, a goal to pursue.

"Visioning" is a process you can use to identify and name the values and beliefs that represent your hopes for your community. For example, if you say, "I hope we can create a community where everyone has an opportunity to succeed," the word that sums up this idea is opportunity.

Why it's important to hold up a vision for our community:

- Creating a vision motivates people. It gives them the energy and spirit to get the job done.
- A clear vision implies and promotes change.
- A vision that embodies cultural values and beliefs can inspire and guide the way community members treat one another.
- "You tend to move in the direction you're looking!"

***Instructions***

The goal of this exercise is to come up with 4 or 5 words that describe the group's hopes for the community. What kinds of positive things do we want to see in our community? What would show that we are living healthy lifestyle?

- Label a piece of newsprint: "Our Community Vision." Set it aside to use at the end of the exercise.
- Label a piece of newsprint: Ideas to Start Our Visioning Process, and list words like: Opportunity, Respect, Safety, Health, Diversity, Spirituality, and Culture. Use this list to start the exercise.
- Ask the group to imagine that they are going to build a monument in the local park that stands for things they like about their community. Their job is to come up with 4 or 5 words that describe their vision of hope for the community. These words will be carved on the monument.
- Do a brainstorm. Write the ideas on the newsprint labeled Ideas to Start Our Visioning Process. (It's OK to include words that describe the community as it is today.)

Use these questions to help the group come up with ideas:

- What are the things that make a community a good place to live and be healthy?
- What words describe the things you like about this community and that make it easier to make good choices about tobacco, food, and exercise?
- How does smoke-free housing support these ideas?

Once the brainstorm is complete, ask the group to talk about:

- What the words mean to them.
- Which ideas matter most.
- How others in the community might feel about these ideas.
- Words they would like to add.

Now, narrow the list to 4 or 5 top ideas:

- Ask group members to vote for their 3 top choices. They can do this with a show of hands, or put stickers next to the 3 words they prefer.
- List the top 4 or 5 words on the paper labeled Our Community Vision.

### **BREAK (5 minutes)**

### **PART 2: What Are People Saying About Healthy Living in Our Community? (60 minutes)**

During the first part of our meeting, we talked about our personal connection to the Bronx. Next, we will talk about the issues and challenges related to maintaining a healthy lifestyle in our neighborhoods, like whether we have access to smoke-free housing. We will also discuss a range of views to help us explore the roots of the problem. This will help us develop action ideas in later sessions.

#### ***Activity 1: Discuss the Information Sheet (15 minutes)***

Please review the attached information sheet and use the following questions to talk about the data:

1. When you look at the information, what stands out? Why?
2. Does anything surprise you? Why?
3. What overall themes and trends do you see?

#### ***Activity 2: Exploring Healthy Living Through Smoke-Free Housing (45 minutes)***

How can we support healthy lifestyles in our neighborhood? Here are a range of views that some people might hold. People have different ideas about the situation so one view cannot tell the whole story. We may agree with each other on some points and disagree on others. That is OK.

And please remember that not all views are represented. These are just examples of what some people could be thinking.

## **Views**

### **1. The government shouldn't tell me what to do in my apartment.**

We're not allowed to smoke in bars and restaurants and as of last year, we can't even smoke in Crotona Park or Orchard Beach! If the government prohibits smoking in apartments, what's next?! This is too much. One's apartment is personal space. No one – especially the government – can tell us what we can and cannot do in our own homes!

### **2. Smoke-free housing is not something that Bronx residents want.**

Most people know that smoking cigarettes is bad for their health. Also, most smokers try not to smoke in front of other people, especially children and seniors. However, if smokers want to smoke in their own apartment, let them smoke! Smoking is a stress reliever for many Bronxites. There are so few places where they can smoke. Smoking in one's own apartment doesn't hurt anyone else, because the smoke is contained in their apartment.

### **3. Young people should have a voice in what happens in their home.**

Children usually do not have a say in who they live with and where they live. Young people are rarely asked to share their concerns, ideas, or solutions. Their knowledge, energy and intelligence shouldn't be ignored. Young people can help with educating their families and neighbors about the benefits of smoke-free housing and helping them quit smoking. We should also make sure that they are voting members of our tenant associations and attend meetings with their landlords. We need to let them know that we value the contribution they can make to the entire community.

### **4. Smoke-free housing only makes sense for people who have money.**

Most people can't pick up and move if their neighbors smoke. They can complain to their landlord, put towels underneath the doors and windows to prevent the smoke from seeping in, but if their neighbors smoke, they just have to deal with it because they can't afford to move. Also, many landlords in less affluent communities don't have the ability to implement a universal smoke-free policy in their apartments, because the buildings are rent stabilized. Therefore, they can only create smoke-free policies as tenants leave or pass away. This doesn't happen very often.

### **5. Tobacco smoke is not a major problem in apartment buildings in the Bronx.**

Most people do not smoke cigarettes or cigars in their apartments. However, smoking weed is very common. It is not abnormal to smell it in the hallways and lobby of most apartment buildings. Therefore, before we prohibit smoking tobacco in apartment buildings, let's focus on having a conversation about weed. Smoking weed is technically illegal, but the issue needs to be addressed.

### **6. There needs to be more education and awareness about how secondhand tobacco smoke affects people if they don't smoke in their homes.**

Most people have heard about the dangerous effects of secondhand smoke. However, the fact that smoke cannot be contained in apartment buildings is not as well known. There needs to be more education about how secondhand smoke is dangerous to all residents of a building, not just smokers. Cleaning the air and ventilating buildings doesn't do much good.

**7. Smoking in apartments costs landlords a lot of money.**

Most landlords would prefer non-smokers in their buildings, because it is cheaper. Smoking causes a lot of damage to the property, including stained walls, burn marks in the rugs, and other cleaning problems. Also, smoking is the leading cause of fire death. With non-smokers, property owners can save money on insurance by decreasing the chance of fire.

Turn to your neighbor. Discuss the following questions for the next five minutes and then report back to the group

- Which views come closest to your own way of thinking? Why?
- Is there anything that you don't agree with or surprise you?
- What views do we agree about? What are things we disagree about?
- What other viewpoints do you think may be missing?

For next time: Think about these views. See if you hear them from others in the community. Also, look and listen for ideas about what we could do to improve the situation.

***Activity 3: Wrap-Up (5 minutes)***

To end this session, let's go around the work and answer the following (5 minutes)

- Name one thing that you enjoyed during this session.
- Name one thing that surprised you.
- Name one way we can improve the next session.

## SESSION 2: WHAT CAN WE DO

### **Part 1: Approaches to Building a Healthier Bronx (45 minutes)**

In Session 2, we talked about challenges to staying healthy in our community. Today, we will talk about how we can start to solve some of these challenges through specific action ideas.

#### ***Activity 1: Getting Started (5 minutes)***

1. Before we get started, let's review the ground rules. Does everyone still agree with the list? Do we need to add anything?
2. Since our last meeting, has anything happened that relates to this issue that you would like to share?
3. Here is a brief summary of what we discussed during Session 1 to help us to be ready for our work today.

#### ***Activity 2: Approaches to Change (40 minutes)***

We've talked about how our neighborhood is doing. Now, we will explore some ways to improve things. What approaches will work well? What will help us deal with health and physical activity gaps? What can we accomplish within one year?

Below is a list of possible approaches. Please take 5 minutes to review them and then turn to your neighbor to talk about them (15 minutes). Use these questions to think about the different approaches:

1. Have we already tried any of these approaches? If so, what happened?
2. Which approaches do you like best? Why?
3. What other approaches can you think of?
4. What approaches might we be able to help move forward because they already have traction in NYC?
5. What approaches won't work? Why?

#### ***Approaches***

##### **1. Focus on personal responsibility.**

People need to be responsible for learning about the benefits of not smoking in their apartment and create or move to a smoke-free building. They should take charge of their health by making better choices, even if this means sacrificing a beautiful apartment to live in a smoke-free building or standing in the cold to smoke. Lifestyle changes can only come from personal commitment..

Someone who supports this approach might like these action ideas:

- Get rid of the ashtrays in their apartment and only smoke outside



- Seek smoking cessation services at the local health center or hospital or by calling 311
- Move to a smoke-free apartment building

## **2. Focus on the community.**

Even if people want to live in a smoke-free building, they need to live in a community that supports it. More resources and time need to be put into the entire community in order for individuals to be able to have healthy options. Creating healthy lifestyles requires that we have a healthy community that values making sure everyone has the ability to live in an apartment without tobacco smoke. Our community needs to be the kind of place that supports good health, not a place that makes people sicker. Communities should make sure that apartment buildings are safe for everyone so that community residents can lead healthy lives.

Someone who supports this approach might like these action ideas:

- Work with landlords to create more apartment buildings that are 100% smoke-free
- Work with local nonprofits and healthcare providers to provide affordable cessation services for smokers who want to quit smoking
- Help to educate landlords and neighbors on the benefits of living in a smoke-free building
- Share your story. If you are being affected by secondhand smoke in the home, voice your concerns to local community boards, elected officials, or community organizations.

## **3. Focus on children.**

By preventing children from being exposed to toxic, secondhand tobacco smoke, we invest in their future and our own. Offering children opportunities to live in smoke-free environments helps them to do better in school, establishes lifetime health habits and shows our responsibility for protecting the next generation.

Someone who supports this approach might like these action ideas:

- Putting up posters in apartment buildings about the health dangers children face due to exposure to secondhand smoke.
- Start a smoking cessation support group for people who live with children.

## **4. Educate tenants and landlords about the health and financial benefits of smoke-free housing.**

Outreach and education can provide tenants and landlords with creative and engaging ways to create smoke-free housing in their communities.

Someone who supports this approach might like these action ideas:

- Offer workshops about the dangers of smoking and financial benefits of smoke-free housing to tenants and landlords at tenant and real estate association meetings, community and faith-based organizations, and Community Board meetings

- Provide technical assistance to landlords interested in adopting a smoke-free policy in their building, including connecting them to other landlords who have smoke-free buildings and helping them with the lease language
- Promote smoke-free housing through mass media and social marketing campaigns
- Increase the number of housing providers and community groups dedicated to teaching people about the benefits of smoke-free housing

##### **5. Focus on working with city officials and city departments**

In order to get the resources and programs our neighborhood needs, we need to build relationships with elected officials and government agencies, especially New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), NYC Health Department, and the Community Boards. We need to work together to create the kind of healthy community we want.

Someone who supports this approach might like these action ideas:

- Working with NYCHA and the Health Department to create one smoke-free building in the Bronx. Currently, they are testing out the idea in Harlem and Brooklyn; however they have not considered it in the Bronx
- Working with elected officials and other community leaders to encourage landlords in their community to make their buildings smoke-free
- Joining your local Community Board to connect to new landlords in the community and provide more resources to community members interested in quitting smoking and adopting a smoke-free policy in their building

Now let's report back to the whole group. What did you think of these approaches? (20 minutes)

**BREAK (5 minutes)**

#### **PART 2: Moving From Conversation to Action. What Can We Do? (70 minutes)**

In this session, we will move to action. First, we will look at the strengths or assets we have. Next, we will brainstorm action ideas. Then we will connect our action ideas with our assets. And, finally, we will set priorities for action.

##### ***Activity 1: Community Assets Brainstorm (15 min)***

Every town or city has assets. Assets can be people, places, or organizations – whatever makes our community a better place is an asset.

"Brainstorming" is a creative way for a group to come up with lots of ideas in a short amount of time. Build on one another's ideas. All ideas are OK. Don't stop to discuss or judge them. The facilitator will write down every idea. Use these headings as a guide:

COMMUNITY ASSETS				
People	Places	Institutions/ Organizations	Funding Sources	Other

Use these questions to help people start the brainstorm:

1. Who has talents and skills that they might offer?
2. What groups in the community can help us out?
3. What sources of funding do we have in our community?
4. What groups do you belong to? How can they help?
5. Can you think of anything else?

***Activity 2: Brainstorm Action Ideas (20 minutes)***

Think about the approaches. Try to come up with specific actions that fit with these approaches. How many different ideas can we come up with?

Make a list of action ideas in the following categories:

- Things that you can do on your own
- Things you can do with other small groups of people
- New partnerships, collaborations, or projects
- New policies
- Institutional change

***Activity 3: Connect Action Ideas with Assets (15 minutes)***

Post list of action ideas beside the assets, and talk about which ones can be linked. Keep these connections in mind as we prioritize our action ideas.

***Activity 4: Set Priorities for Action (10 minutes)***

Look at our list of ideas for action. Now we are going to narrow it down to a few ideas to take to the action forum where people from all the discussion groups will meet to share their ideas.

These questions will help you set priorities for action:

- Which ideas are easiest to get done?
- Who would work with us on these ideas?
- Which ideas might do the most good?
- Which ideas might have a long-term impact?

As a group, choose two or three ideas that are important and doable. Then, consider the following questions:

- What would it take to make this happen?
- What community assets could we use to move this idea forward?
- What kind of support do we need to take these steps? Who else could we link up with?
- How do we begin?

Write the top two or three ideas on a flip chart labeled Priority Action Ideas.

***Activity 5: Get Ready for the Action Forum (10 minutes)***

The facilitator will explain the agenda for the action forum and the group will choose someone to present their top 2 or 3 ideas for action at the event.

## ACTION FORUM

Community conversation programs lead to action in many ways. One way to do this is through an Action Forum. This is a large-group meeting at the end of a round of conversation. Ideas from all the conversation circles are presented at the Action Forum. There are usually several action ideas that many people support.

To move these ideas forward, people form action groups or task forces. Some people may join these action groups. Some may choose to help in other ways. In community conversation programs that continue over time, more and more people get involved, and many kinds of action occur.

### **Agenda: Action Forum (1.5 to 3 Hours)**

1. Social time: Refreshments, Entertainment, Gallery Walk (time to read summaries from each circle posted around the room)
2. Welcome and Introductions
  - Moderator welcomes everyone and introduces sponsors.
  - Review agenda.
  - Talk about the study circle effort in the community.
  - Thank facilitators and other key volunteers.
3. Reports From the Community Conversations
  - A representative from each conversation circle speaks for a few minutes.
  - Be sure to include vision and community assets.
4. Moving to Action
  - Moderator identifies the most common themes for action from all community conversations, and invites participants to sign up for an action group or task force.
  - People choose action groups, and sign up.
  - Leader for each action group collects names, and sets a date for the first meeting.
  - People sign up for facilitator training, or to help organize future community conversation.
5. Closing remarks
  - Closing remarks. (Describe how the action efforts will be tracked and tied to further organizing.)
  - Next steps. (Include plans for another round of conversations, celebration, or check-in meeting.)

## INFORMATION SHEET

The following information can help us understand what challenges and opportunities we have in our community, especially related to tobacco and smoke-free housing.

### **How healthy are Bronx residents?**

- In its annual county health report, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation found that the Bronx ranks 62 out of 62 counties in NY State in health outcomes.<sup>1</sup>
- Nearly 1 in 4 adults living in the Bronx rated their own health as fair to poor, with Hispanic or Latino residents more likely than other groups to rate their health as fair to poor.<sup>2</sup>
- The South Bronx has the highest rates of asthma in the City, with the neighborhoods of Morrisania/Belmont, Mott Haven/Hunt's Point, and University/Fordham ranking one, two and three respectively. Asthma rates in the Bronx are eight times higher than the national average.<sup>2</sup>
- In 5 out of 7 Bronx neighborhoods, cancer was the cause of the most potential life years lost.<sup>3</sup>

### **How many Bronx residents smoke or are exposed to secondhand smoke?**

- 151,000 adults living in the Bronx smoke tobacco;<sup>2</sup> this is one of the highest rates of smoking in NYC.
- South Bronx residents are 35% more likely to be current smokers than NYC residents overall.<sup>2</sup>
- 3,000 public high school students<sup>4</sup> in the Bronx currently smoke; one-third of whom will die prematurely as a direct result of smoking.<sup>5</sup>
- More than 500,000 adults and children in NYC are exposed to secondhand smoke at home.<sup>6</sup>

### **Why is smoke-free housing so important?**

- Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death in the U.S.<sup>7,8</sup>
- Smoking is the direct cause of many chronic diseases such as heart disease, lung cancer, other cancers, as well as respiratory disease.<sup>7</sup> It kills more New Yorkers than AIDS, drugs, homicide and suicide combined.<sup>9</sup>
- Smoking is the leading cause of fire-related deaths in the U.S. and caused 556 fires in New York City in 2009.<sup>10,11</sup>
- There is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke. Children living with second hand smoke are at increased risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, ear and respiratory infections, and worsening asthma symptoms.<sup>12</sup>
- The Campaign for Tobacco-free Kids estimates that each pack of cigarettes sold adds \$10.47 per pack in smoking-related health care costs and lost productivity.<sup>13</sup>

### **What are the benefits of smoke-free housing?**

- Nearly 90% of housing in the Bronx in multi-unit buildings.<sup>14</sup> Air movement from one unit to another in apartment buildings is significant. Toxic secondhand smoke can easily get into non-smokers apartments through vents and cracks in the walls and doors. In some case, up to 65% of air is shared between units.<sup>15</sup>

- On average, it costs 6 times more for a landlord to rehabilitate a residential unit of a smoker than a non-smoker.<sup>16</sup>
- Property owners of smoke-free buildings may also be able to save money on insurance by decreasing the chance of fire.

### **Where can I find smoke-free housing in the Bronx?**

- List of apartments in the Bronx that are smoke-free:  
<http://www.smokefreehousingny.rentlinx.com/Listings.aspx?County=Bronx>
- South Bronx Overall Economic Development Corporation, Nos Quedamos Community Development Corporation, and Acacia Network/Promesa have adopted 100% smoke-free policies in a few of their buildings.
- Approximately, 40% of smokers and 80% of non-smokers already have a no-smoking rule in their own home.<sup>2</sup>

### **Is smoke-free housing legal?**

- Smoke-free policies are legal and encouraged by the US Department of Housing & Urban Development.<sup>17</sup> Such policies do not discriminate against smokers; they simply require people to smoke outdoors, where their secondhand smoke will not drift into neighboring units.<sup>18</sup>
- A rent-stabilized apartment can only be designated as smoke-free with the consent of the current tenant or if the apartment turns over.<sup>19</sup>

### **Where is smoking prohibited? Is there any legislation that limits the power of the tobacco industry?**

In NYC, smoking is prohibited in the following locations:

- All workplaces and indoor recreational venues, including all restaurants and most bars.
- Some outdoor restaurant and bar seating areas.
- Hospital grounds and within fifteen feet of any hospital entrance or exit.
- All public parks, beaches and pedestrian plazas
- The platforms of the Long Island and Metro North railroads.
- Within 100 feet of public or private school entryways.
- Common areas (hallways, common rooms, etc.) of buildings of 10 or more apartments.

Other legislation:

- In NY State, the sale of “flavored” tobacco products is prohibited and the sale of e-cigarettes to anyone under the age of eighteen is prohibited.
- In the US, tobacco advertising on billboards, print ads in magazines with 15 percent or more youth readership, use of cartoon characters such as Joe Camel, and public

distribution of promotional gear are prohibited by tobacco companies. Also, the Food and Drug Administration has the authority to regulate tobacco.

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