Smoking and Vaping Policies in Newly Constructed, State-Funded Multiunit Housing in California

Amanda Ta[2], Georg Matt[1,2], Gunnar Wooldridge[1,3], Lydia Greiner[1,2]

Policy Research Center for Tobacco and the Environment[1], San Diego State University[2], San Diego State University Research Foundation[3]

Goal

- Examine the adoption of smoke- and vape-free policies in California state-subsidized housing.

Background

- Despite a decline in overall smoking prevalence, **1/3** of nonsmokers living in multiunit housing report secondhand smoke exposure. [1]
- Since **2018**, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has required smoke-free public housing; however, the rule excludes vaping and many mixed-finance properties supported by the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC). [2]
- Between **2021** and **2025**, **769** California affordable housing projects received LIHTC allocations; of these, **281** newly constructed, state-subsidized developments also received state tax credits, placing many outside HUD rule. [3]
- Without a state ban, smoking and vaping policies in these newly constructed developments remain **unclear**.

Methods

- Used California Tax Credit Allocation Committee (CTCAC) data to identify all newly constructed, state-subsidized multiunit housing (MUH) developments placed in service between **2021** and **2025** (N=**281**).
- Selected a random sample of **57** developments, stratified by housing type (Figure 1), and conducted **structured telephone interviews** with property management companies on site. We asked whether smoking or vaping was allowed in units, balconies, or shared indoor spaces, and whether policies were included in leases.

An **overwhelming majority** of newly built, state-subsidized apartment buildings in California **prohibit** smoking and vaping.

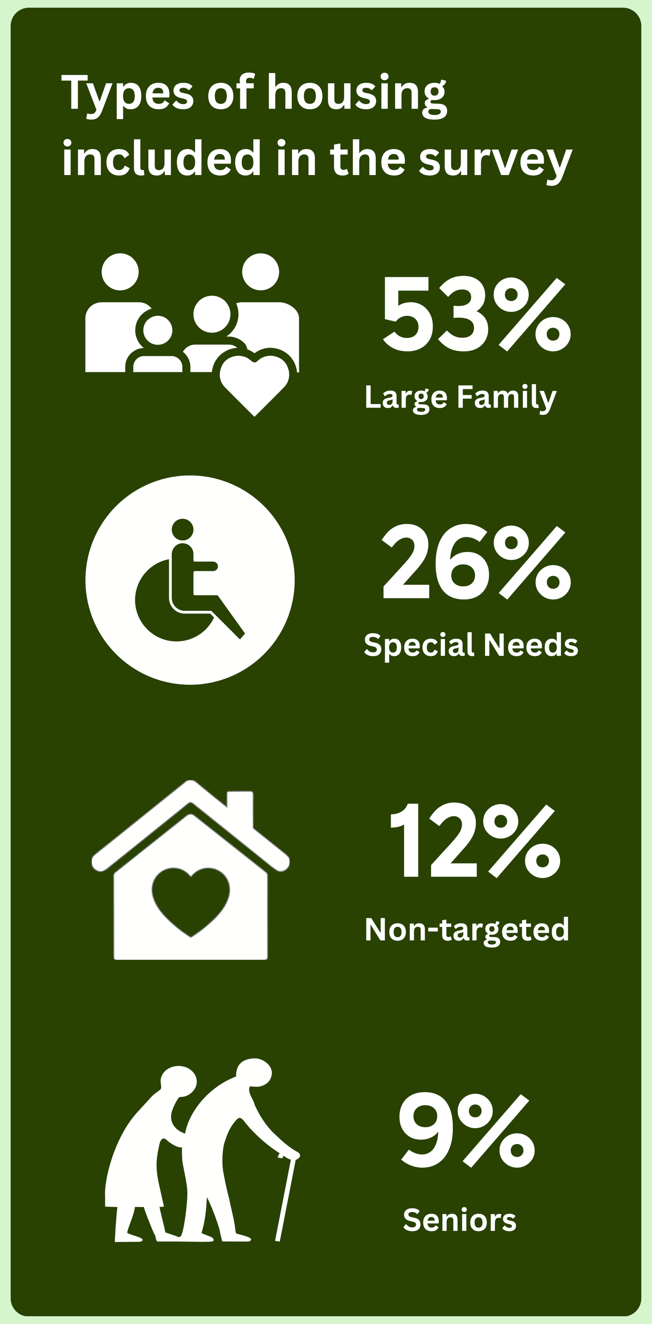

Figure 1. Housing type distribution

98% prohibited smoking and vaping in **residential units** and **balconies.**

100% prohibited smoking and vaping in **shared indoor spaces.**

95% included smoking and vaping rules in the **lease.**

Figure 2. Smoking and vaping prohibitions and inclusion in leases.

Lease language **largely** reflects **smoke-** and **vape-free** housing standards.

95% Stated smoking and vaping rules in the lease.

2% Did not include smoking and vaping rules in the lease.

3% Did not disclose lease information.

98% reported **no exceptions** to these rules.

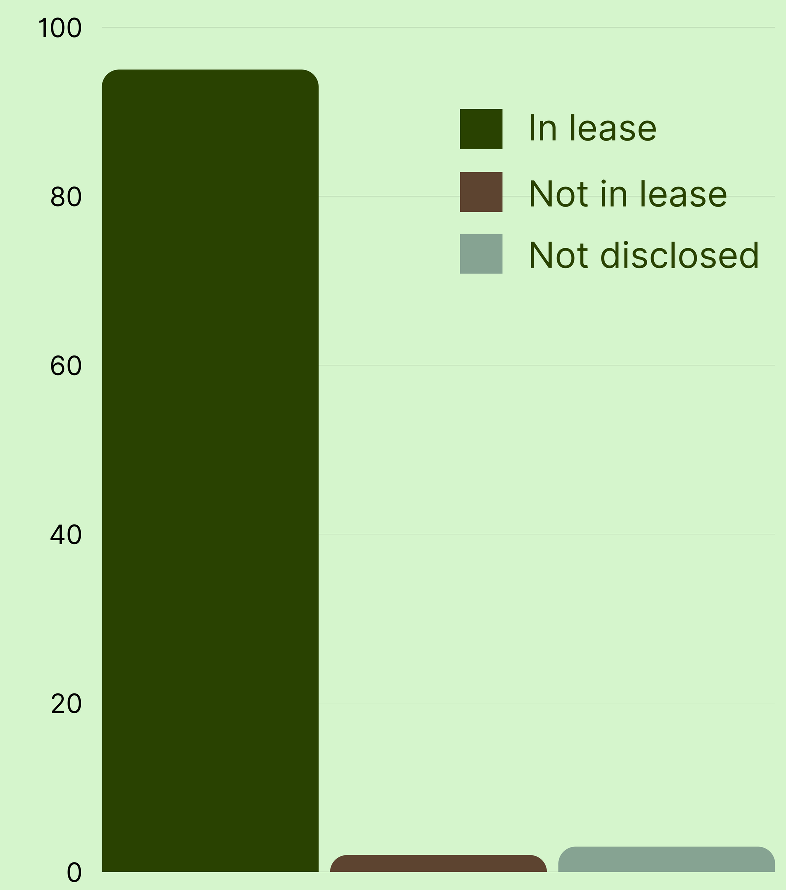

Figure 3. Lease language and policy inclusion

Results

In **2021–2025**, among a stratified random sample of **57** newly constructed, state-subsidized MUH developments in California:

- **98**% prohibited smoking or vaping in residential units and on balconies; none permitted smoking in indoor common areas (100% prohibited).
- **95**% stated that smoking and vaping rules were included in lease agreements; **2**% did not include these rules; **3**% would not disclose lease information.
- **98**% reported no exceptions to smoke-free or vape-free policies.

Conclusion

- The purpose of this study was to assess current smoking and vaping policies in newly constructed, state-subsidized multiunit housing (MUH) developments in California.
- Even **without a federal or state mandate**, smoking and vaping are **largely prohibited** in residential units, balconies, and indoor common areas across these developments, providing **greater resident protection** than current HUD rules.
- This voluntary adoption likely reflects decades of public health education and comprehensive smoke-free laws in public buildings, workplaces, and transportation, which have shifted social norms about where smoking is acceptable. Smoke-free indoor environments are now widely expected, including at home.
- Strong voluntary adoption of smoke-free and vape-free policies in subsidized housing has important implications for reducing secondhand and thirdhand smoke exposure and supports continued expansion of smoke-free policies across all types of multiunit housing.

References

1. California Department of Public Health. (n.d.). *Secondhand smoke in multi-unit housing fact sheet*. California Department of Public Health.
2. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2016). *Instituting smoke-free public housing* (24 C.F.R. pts. 965, 966). *Federal Register, 81*(227), 87430–87444. https://www.federalregister.gov/d/2016-28986
3. California Tax Credit Allocation Committee. (2025). *List of projects* [Data set]. California State Treasurer's Office. Retrieved October 31, 2025, from https://www.treasurer.ca.gov/ctcac/projects.asp

Policy Research Center for Tobacco and the Environment

SDSU San Diego State University