

Columbia receives grant to help smokers quit

The Health Department would focus on residents of public housing, low-income workers
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BY [Aaron Cooper](#)

COLUMBIA — A \$118,293 grant to help people quit smoking has been awarded to the Health Department.

The Public Health and Human Services Department plans to use the grant money to help smokers at two public housing buildings and eight area companies kick the habit. The goal is to get 25 percent of people who sign up to quit smoking.

The Columbia City Council must first review and accept the grant before the Health Department can begin the program. If the council accepts it, the grant would start in October and last through September 2013.

The Missouri Foundation for Health awarded the grant on July 21.

People with low incomes are more likely to be smokers, health planner Linda Cooperstock said. That's why the Health Department plans to focus on residents of Paquin Tower and Oak Towers, which are managed by the Columbia Housing Authority, and workers at eight area companies who make low wages. The companies have not been selected.

“Those are areas at greater risk of having more smokers,” Cooperstock said.

About 135 of the 345 residents of Paquin Tower and Oak Towers smoke, resident services coordinator April Steffensmeier said.

The program would last four weeks, Cooperstock said. People would wear nicotine patches supplied by the Health Department and meet in groups to talk about their attempts to quit and to help each other.

The Health Department learned in a 2007 study that group meetings are more successful than one-on-one sessions in helping people quit.

“When you provide smoking cessation in an environment where people work or gather frequently together, you increase the quit rate,” Cooperstock said. “The moral support you get at work or at home is helpful.”

At the end of the four weeks, the Health Department would call participants to learn how to improve the program, she said. The four-week cycle would be repeated during the two years of the grant.

Cooperstock spoke passionately about helping people quit smoking.

Smoking and obesity are "the two big things that kill people," she said. "If we could make great strides in both of them, we would really reduce the premature death rate by a significant amount."

Steffensmeier said smoking was allowed in all rooms at Paquin Tower and Oak Towers until recently.

"We made a couple floors smoke-free to better accommodate people with disabilities," she said. "It went well."

Steffensmeier said she would welcome the grant.

"We tried a smoking cessation class with a very small number of participants," she said. "It was difficult at first, but residents changed. This will help on a larger scale."

The Missouri Foundation for Health was formed from the former Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Missouri. Its mission is to distribute 5 percent — or about \$50 million — of its assets every year to "health-focused" nonprofits in 84 counties in Missouri and the city of St. Louis, foundation spokeswoman Bev Pfeifer-Harms said.

The foundation also paid for the study in 2007.

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