



MASSACHUSETTS
GENERAL HOSPITAL

CENTER FOR COMMUNITY
HEALTH IMPROVEMENT

Revere CARES and Living Tobacco-Free Join Forces to Restrict Tobacco Sales in Revere

Revere's Board of Health recently approved a regulation that raises the minimum age for tobacco retail sales from 18 to 21 ("T-21"), joining Everett, Chelsea and Boston, and other Massachusetts cities and towns. Two CCHI programs - **Revere CARES** and MGH Community Health Associates **Living Tobacco-Free** - have worked together with the Six City Tobacco Initiative over the past two years to advocate for raising the sales age and other changes in Revere's tobacco regulations. Their work came to fruition in February when the Board of Health adopted T-21 and 11 other amendments to the existing tobacco regulations, all aimed at reducing tobacco use among young people.



The Six City Tobacco Initiative raises awareness about tobacco control and teaches communities ways to reduce tobacco-use and its devastating impact. Bonny Carroll, the Initiative's director, said, "Revere CARES' and Living Tobacco-Free's work was invaluable to the Revere Board of Health's ultimately adopting the amendments. I think the data Living Tobacco-Free provided and Revere CARES' community input, particularly Viviana's (Catano) as a Revere resident, provided crucial information and perspective."

Viviana Catano, a program manager at Revere CARES and a Revere resident with two young children says, "The environment within which young people live influences the decisions they make. Increasing the tobacco sales age is an excellent example of a policy change that positively affects young people's environment. Raising the minimum sales age from 18 to 21 helps remove cigarettes and other tobacco products from high school students' social networks. This environmental change makes it easier for them to make healthy life choices."



Jonina Gorenstein, manager of MGH CHA's Living Tobacco-Free, observes that the incidence of lung cancer is 51% higher among women in Revere and 27% higher among men in Revere compared to Massachusetts overall. "We want to end tobacco-related disease and mortality in this generation right here, right now," says Gorenstein. "When the Institute of Medicine estimates that increasing the tobacco age to 21 across the country could decrease smoking prevalence by 12%, we want Revere youth to be part of that 12%; and we want them to have their share of the 4.2 million fewer years of life

lost." Living Tobacco-Free is a tobacco cessation and prevention program which operates in all the MGH Health Centers and surrounding communities.

A policy change both Catano and Gorenstein wish the Board had adopted would have restricted the sale of flavored tobacco products to adult-only retail stores. Cigarillos (small cigars) and hookah sticks (a type of e-cigarette) sold in stores have flavors like cotton candy, bubble gum, peach and strawberry. "Selling flavored, cheap tobacco products like cigarillos and e-cigarettes is a marketing tactic specifically aimed at young people with the purpose of nurturing the next generation of smokers," says Gorenstein. Revere CARES launched a

petition urging the sale of flavored products be restricted. It garnered over 400 signatures, but the opposition before the Board of Health prevailed. Catano added, "Either the state will restrict sales of flavored tobacco, or we'll come back to it in Revere."

In the meantime, not all is quiet in Revere. A local store owner has filed a lawsuit challenging the Board of Health's adoption of the new tobacco regulation amendments. But, that's not stopping Catano and Gorenstein. They've offered to help Bonny Carroll enforce the new age 21 sales requirement in Revere once it becomes effective in September.

- *Jonina Gorenstein*