



# Legislative Brief: Latinos for a Smoke-Free Texas

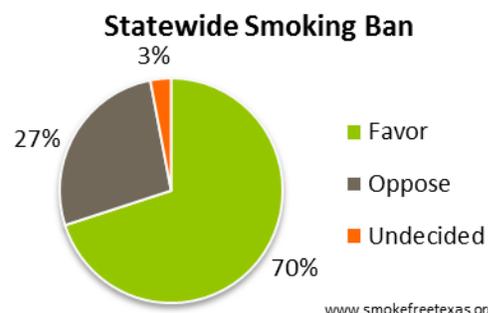


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Latinos are a complex and diverse community whose *bienestar* (well-being) is a reflection of their cultural values, socio-economic circumstances and environmental conditions. But their disproportionate experience with health and health insurance disparities, financial insecurity, and low educational attainment makes them a highly vulnerable population. With tobacco use and exposure a major contributing cause of most premature deaths, supporting policy to reduce or prevent tobacco use and protect families from the dangers of second hand smoke will have positive impacts on the health and financial outcomes for all Latinos.

For Latinos in Texas, a disproportionate likelihood of being exposed to secondhand smoke in their workplaces and the lack of smoke-free regulations in their community makes this a worker’s right and safety issue. Latinos, which account for 37% of the Texas workforce, are twice more likely to work in the service occupations than Whites—where they are least likely to be protected from secondhand smoke. One quarter of the Texas population that lives in poverty is Latino, 60% of those uninsured in 2008 were Latinos, and even when educated, Latinos with a Bachelor’s degree are three times less likely to be insured than their White counterparts. Given that Latinos have less access to health insurance and are more prone to financial insecurity, the chances of having problems from smoking or secondhand smoke exposure at an early stage puts them at greater risk of death from lung disease, heart disease and other chronic and fatal health effects.

To date, Texas does not have a statewide law that prohibits smoking indoors in public places, but numerous cities and towns have incorporated ordinances against indoor smoking since 2001. Currently, 36 Texas cities and 45% of Texans are covered by a comprehensive Smoke-Free Workplace ordinance, while 227 cities have limited nonsmoking ordinances. In August 19, 2011, San Antonio modified their smoking ordinance and became a “smoke-free” city, making it one of the last major cities to adopt a comprehensive smoke-free ordinance for its citizens—of which 64% are Latinos. This recent victory comes at a time when 70% of Texas voters favor a statewide law that prohibits smoking in all indoor workplaces, pushing state Legislators to work for a statewide smoking ban to follow on their cities’ footsteps. Without a statewide smoke-free law, 23% of Texans will remain exposed to secondhand smoke because they live in unincorporated cities or rural areas where no entity exists to pass or enforce this type of legislation



## 82nd Legislature Debrief:

Earlier in the 82nd Legislative Session, a bipartisan group of more than 80 legislators introduced, for the third time since 2006, a statewide smoking ban in Texas. HB 670, and its sister SB 355, would prohibit smoking in public places, restaurants and bars that could have resulted in significant savings in health care costs, especially as related to the effects of secondhand smoke. These savings would increase over time and reduce the state’s Medicaid expenditures by at least \$10 million in All Funds or by \$4 million in General Revenue funds for the 2012-2013 biennium alone.

But due to a very challenging Legislative Session, SB 355 was ultimately postponed and later removed from the Legislative calendar. Legislators then re-introduced the smoking ban as an amendment to SB 1811, a fiscal bill, with the reasoning that the smoking ban could reduce Medicaid expenses by \$13 million. The amendment met objections and was stripped from the bill by a Senate Committee, removing any chance

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for the amendment to go up for a vote by the entire Senate. In the end, Smoke-Free Texas failed to gather the legislative support needed for a “stand-alone” bill or as an amendment a larger bill.

This was largely shaped by the state’s \$20 billion budget deficit, the leadership’s state priorities that included requiring voter photo identification at polls, immigration and congressional redistricting and the influence of political actors such as the Tea Party.

While the efforts continue to move forward with a statewide smoking ban ultimately, the decision to smoke is a personal one, but the effects of secondhand smoke coupled with the associated high health care costs, make it our state’s business to pass a comprehensive smoking ban that protects all Texas Latinos, and all Texans for that matter. And it makes it our business to fight more fiercely, through civic engagement and collaboration, for the protection of our *bienestar* (well-being).

The 83<sup>rd</sup> Legislative Session begins in January 2013; let’s make it our business now to engage our community, coalitions, and legislators to make Texas Smoke-Free.