



# Cherokee Nation's Steps Program

Reducing tobacco use on campus

## What is the public health problem?

Tobacco use and exposure presents major health risks for students and school staff members alike. Smoking prevalence is high in Oklahoma as a whole (25%), and the smoking rate is even higher in American Indian populations (34%).\*

## How Steps is responding

The Steps Program helped schools reduce tobacco use by implementing the *School Health Index* (SHI)<sup>†</sup> and creating a healthier school environment for American Indian youth.

- In 2004, the Cherokee Nation Steps Program provided SHI training to 65 school administrators, teachers, staff members, and partnering organizations.
- All 19 schools with a predominantly American Indian student enrollment completed the SHI and created and implemented action plans for improvement.
- The Steps Program provided technical assistance, including the U.S. Lung Association's "Tools for Schools" Indoor Air Quality training, which is designed to give schools the information and skills needed to manage air quality.

## What is the impact?

- Nine schools developed and implemented 24/7 tobacco-free environment policies.
- All 19 schools made other changes in the school environment, including developing overall wellness policies, offering healthier food choices in cafeterias and vending machines, and providing lighting and access to exercise facilities after school.
- As a result of Steps' efforts, the Oklahoma State Health Department requested that the Steps Program conduct an SHI train-the-trainer workshop for state health department employees.

## Why this program is working

The SHI, developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, is a self-assessment tool that includes research-based guidelines for school health programs. Evidence indicates that it is an effective tool in establishing the policies and practices needed to improve health-related behaviors of young people. In addition, implementing and enforcing a comprehensive smoking ban on school campuses reduces the risks to students from secondhand smoke and helps reduce smoking among young people.

\* Oklahoma Tobacco Use Prevention Service: [http://www.ok.gov/health/documents/Oklahoma%20Adults\\_Smoking.pdf](http://www.ok.gov/health/documents/Oklahoma%20Adults_Smoking.pdf)  
† <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/shi/default.aspx>