

The Dempsey Center


More than just a tobacco policy update

Background and Approach:

Tobacco use is a leading cause of cancer. People who use tobacco products or who are regularly exposed to secondhand smoke have an increased risk of cancer. The chemicals in tobacco products and secondhand smoke increase the risk of cancer by damaging a cell's DNA, allowing for cancerous cells to be created and by weakening the body's immune system and its ability to control or kill cancer cells.

Founded in 2008, the **Dempsey Center's mission is to make life better for people managing the impacts of cancer.** They do this by providing free cancer support, education and complementary therapies to cancer patients, their families and caregivers from their locations in Lewiston and South Portland. In addition, the Dempsey Center has collaborated with Healthy Androscoggin to proactively provide awareness and education about the connection between tobacco and cancer. For the past ten years, the two organizations have worked together to offer high-quality, no-cost tobacco cessation programming to local area community members.

When the Dempsey Center determined they wanted to be more proactive with their own workplace tobacco policy, they reached out to Healthy Androscoggin for assistance. **As a result, the Dempsey Center passed a stronger smoke- and tobacco-free policy effective April 1, 2021.** The updated policy included information about quit resources and general enforcement and compliance expectations. Not only did they update their tobacco policy, they also took the opportunity to review and improve their drug-free workplace policy.



"I have felt, firsthand, the impact of cancer. Twelve years ago, at the age of 53, I lost my mom to lung cancer as a result of her tobacco addiction. At the Dempsey Center, our mission is to make life better for people managing the impact of cancer. This includes educating cancer patients, their loved ones, and care partners to bring awareness to preventable cancers and encourage them to take action by living a healthier lifestyle. As an organization, and for me personally, we take a stand for policies which lead to a reduction in tobacco use such as our tobacco and drug-free policy, developed with Healthy Androscoggin, and by guiding all those we connect with about the impact that tobacco has on individuals and their loved ones."

- Tim Griffin, Board Chair, Dempsey Center

Results and Successes:

As a result of this collaboration between the two organizations, not only will the Dempsey Center's **29 employees** be protected from the dangers of secondhand smoke exposure, but the **2,500 community members** who visit their locations annually will be as well.

Tobacco-free environments adopted by organizations and workplaces like the Dempsey Center protect everyone – tobacco users and non-users alike by helping to reduce exposure to secondhand smoke. In addition, they encourage a reduction in the number of cigarettes an individual smokes in a day and potentially increase the number of tobacco users who quit – all of which are critically important in the fight against cancer.