
Argentina anti-tobacco program receives global Heart Hero Award



Olavarría: Tobacco Free City, a city-run tobacco advocacy, education, and support program, was presented with the globally-recognized Louise Lown Heart Hero Award from ProCor.

Olavarría, a city of 120,000 people 350km south of Buenos Aires, faces an uphill battle in its fight against tobacco: Argentina has the second highest smoking prevalence in all of Central and South America.

According to local health data, one-third of adults in Olavarría use tobacco and almost half of the mortality rate is attributed to chronic diseases such as hypertension, stroke, and cancer. However, that hasn't stopped the efforts of a dedicated community and its leaders in reducing the local impact of tobacco.

Under the direction of this program, the overall adult smoking prevalence in Olavarría decreased by 18% over four years and cardiovascular disease-related visits at local hospitals dropped by one-third.

Dr. Carlos Joulie, chair of the Public Health department at the University of Salvador, presented the award to Mayor José Eseverri and program staff on behalf of ProCor and Dr. Lown, founder and chair of ProCor. "As mayor, I'm proud to carry forward a policy that is a pioneer in our province and widely supported by our community," Eseverri said. "This award distinguishes us as the city we want to be – modern, friendly, and providing people a good quality of life."

Started in 2004, Olavarría: Tobacco Free City works with many local stakeholders – schools, health professionals, businesses, community groups, politicians, and the public – to train health workers, educate students and teachers, engage in community activities, and garner support for public smoking bans.

As a result of these efforts, Olavarría is now 100% tobacco-free in bars, restaurants, most major shopping centers, and in cars whenever a child is present; hundreds of health workers, teachers, and students have received tobacco-related education and training; and eight tobacco health centers have been established throughout the city.

The ban on smoking in enclosed places was supported by 90% of Olavarría's citizens. "I think that the main strength of the program is community participation," said Dr. Fernando Verra, president of the Argentinean Society of Tobacco Sciences.

"It's amazing to see how social and academic institutions, shopping centers, health clinics, the media, and unions are working together." According to Raúl Pitarque, the program's director, the motivation behind the program is clear. "This is an opportunity to convey to society and our children that smoking is not normal, that it is not a minor defect and that it is a serious problem of individual and community health." Pitarque added, "We strongly believe that the endeavor to control the use of tobacco is a very important contribution to the health of our neighbors."

César A. Di Giano, president of the Argentinean Union Against Tobacco, said whenever his organization wants to

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show how communities can be successful fighting tobacco, he mentions Olavarría. “We believe that the main strength of the tobacco control program is its continuity in time and the commitment from many institutions,” Di Giano said. “Everything we have said and lived in Olavarría is the result of a team effort, with the commitment of all social institutions, schools, health personnel, politicians, and the community.” The annual Louise Lown Heart Hero Award recognizes innovative, preventive approaches to cardiovascular health in developing countries.

The award was established in 2007 by Dr. Bernard Lown, an internationally-renowned cardiologist and Nobel Peace Prize recipient, to honor his wife, Louise and her lifelong commitment to the rights and well-being of others as a social worker, activist, and writer.

ProCor is an international health communication network working to prevent cardiovascular disease by increasing access to information about preventive strategies that can be transformed into action in clinical, research, policy, and community settings. Contact: Benn Grover, Editor, ProCor Telephone: 1 617 732 1318 x3332 Email: bgrover@partners.org [1]

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