



Episode Details:

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Title: Episode 12: Counter Tools' Executive Director Maria Julian & Her Vision of the Future

Description: In this episode, we speak with Counter Tools' new Executive Director, Maria Julian. Learn about her visions for the future of Counter Tools and Counter Tobacco.org and hear what she thinks we should be on the lookout for in tobacco control this upcoming year.

Transcription:

Allie Rothschild: 00:00 I'm Allie Rothschild, and you're listening to the Counter Tobacco Podcast. [music] Today we're talking with Counter Tools' new Executive Director, Maria Julian. She's a visionary leader with a passion for health equity and a commitment to advancing place-based public health. I sat down with Maria to hear about where she came from, where Counter Tools, Counter Tobacco, and the industry are headed, and why point-of-sale tobacco control is so important. I first want to start by asking you to tell a little bit about yourself and your journey to becoming the executive director of Counter Tools.

Maria Julian: 00:44 I came to Counter Tools with a background in nonprofit management and public health administration. Immediately prior to Counter Tools, I was working at a District Health Department in western North Carolina called AppHealthCare with a really wonderful team of community health policy change and systems and environmental change staff members. And, I learned a lot there about policy change and also how a community can come together and mobilize to make lasting change happen, even at the local level. Prior to that, I did a smattering of other public health work and also some international development work in Rwanda with Partners in Health and also a stint in the Peace Corps in Moldova.

Allie Rothschild: 01:30 That's awesome! And that transitions well into my next question. So what are some priorities you have set for Counter Tools and Counter Tobacco moving forward?

Maria Julian: 01:41 I would say that this has been a true team effort to identify these priorities and to also set them in motion. Counter Tools has an incredibly strong team of intelligent and passionate and driven individuals - that's one of the things that I love the most about working for Counter Tools. And just last month, we had a strategic planning retreat and identified some of the key priorities that we have moving forward, and most of these build on the roles that we already have and I think the work that we've already come to recognize ourselves as doing. So we're working on building our identity as a convener and building that up even more than we've done in the past. That's something that we've been hearing over and over again from our client partners, that they're looking for us to take on a stronger role and convening prevention and enforcement partners together. We're also looking at new ways to



innovate our products and services and making sure that we're staying relevant with best practices and the best available science and also with the needs and demands of the industry and of trends in public health.

Maria Julian: 02:51

And I would say, lastly, we're also working on strengthening our internal capacity. With these new priorities also comes the need for our own team to level up and make sure that we can provide the best possible data analysis and ability to tell really great stories. So we think that these things will result in much more consulting for policy change across the board, and we'll also be developing new features for storytelling both in our software and what we can provide in our consulting. And, we're also excited to expand our portfolio with other substances. We have a strong foundation in tobacco work, but we've found success over the last few years also supporting partners in work around alcohol prevention and enforcement. And, we're also looking to support, in a broader sense, what a healthy place and a healthy built environment looks like - whether that's access to healthy food or eliminating other undesirable factors in a built environment.

Allie Rothschild: 03:56

So talking a bit more about the industry and policy, in the past few months, a lot has happened with the federal ban and the minimum legal sales age moving to 21. So what trajectory do you see the field going in this year and in years to come? What are some things we should keep an eye out for in 2020?

Maria Julian: 04:18

I think the first thing that comes to my mind is a real intentional focus on health equity. I think it's just simply unacceptable that tobacco use is increasingly being concentrated among specific geographic, racial, and social groups. And that's something that we've been working to address for a long time, but it needs a more targeted focus now and we know of some of the pro-equity solutions at the point of sale that we can use to address the challenges include raising tobacco prices, and restricting tobacco retailers from locating near schools, and restricting the sale of menthol cigarettes and all other flavored tobacco products. I was actually at a local coalition meeting this morning for my own community, Watauga Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition, and we were talking about the importance of local policy change, especially around flavors, and in light of even the federal T21 policy change, because we know that it's going to take each of us at the local level to inject prevention and enforcement of these policy changes to make them meaningful. I think more broadly too this relates a lot to the world of tobacco but also other unhealthy substances. I think our healthcare system is evolving as we find better ways to leverage new technologies, and finding new ways for data to drive our decision-making, and I'm excited about an increased focus from the medical world on population health management. I think that the worlds of public health and the medical world are only going to converge more and more if we learn ways that we can collaborate together. So, I'm excited about opportunities for public health entities like Counter Tools to collaborate more closely with healthcare delivery systems. We know that 80% of what affects health outcomes is associated with factors outside of traditional healthcare delivery. And, I think as our healthcare delivery systems focus more on social determinants of health, entities like Counter Tools, we're going to be there at the table to figure out how we can work together to improve health



outcomes. And, I think that will also give us an opportunity to work on policies that can address the retail environment in a more holistic way - so tackling multiple issues at once that we know are interrelated and still are going to impact the bottom line in terms of tobacco prevention and cessation.

Allie Rothschild: 06:46

So you talked about it a little bit already, but can you go in a little bit more depth on why you find tobacco control specifically at the point of sale to be such an important area of work?

Maria Julian: 06:58

Yeah, definitely. I think at the heart of what we do, it's about building resiliency in a community. And this is an issue that affects everyone really closely, whether it's my own individual behaviors, or the loved ones around me, whom I care about. I think that we can see really direct and immediate results when we work on this issue at the point of sale, and for someone who is in the field of public health, it's important for us to take those wins when we can see small, incremental changes that are going to have a lasting effect down the line. It's also really important to me as it is, I think, for a lot of public health professionals, that we create systemic change, something that's going to disrupt the status quo and is going to have lasting change for future generations as well, and across the board. And, I think it speaks to the essence of what Counter Tools is about too - bringing partners together and providing the tools they need to tell the story of their communities' health. So I love that tobacco control at point of sale is something that matters at a national scale, and that we can work together on that, but at the end of the day, it takes a community mobilizing to make that change happen.

Allie Rothschild: 08:16

So do you have any final words or messages that you want to say to our listeners out there?

Maria Julian: 08:22

Yeah, I think this has got me thinking where Counter Tools has been and where we're headed, and I just want to acknowledge that one of the founding principles that Counter Tools was built on was this idea that place has a profound impact on our health and that today remains at the core of what we do. And, we're also built on a strong foundation of drawing on the best available science and an evidence-based model of change that helps partners reduce the impact of products that harm the health of individuals and also of our communities. And I think it's important as we learn more about how each of us interacts with our built environment that we guide our public health partners through more robust ways of understanding our relationship with place. So, thinking back to where we started from, this idea of place-based public health, that couldn't be more important than it is today. And I think our assessment of the built environment is, as we move forward, we're going to need to expand our understanding of how we interact with place and in our surroundings. And this is an exciting time for Counter Tools because I think a lot of smart minds, all of our network of partners, is thinking about this issue and the complex ways in which we interact with our surroundings, and how we can improve public health from the perspective of our community.

Allie Rothschild: 09:49

Well, it sounds like there's a lot to do and we are very excited and happy to have you at the helm. So thank you so much for speaking with us today.



Maria Julian: 09:58

Thank you, Allie. I'm thankful to get to continue to be a part of this great team.

Allie Rothschild: 10:02

Thank you so much for tuning in with us today. To find out more about Counter Tools, you can go to CounterTools.org. To find out more about Counter Tobacco, you can head to CounterTobacco.org or find us on Facebook or Twitter at Counter Tobacco. We'll see you next time.