



AN INITIATIVE OF

the de Beaumont Foundation + Kaiser Permanente

2021 POLICY ASSESSMENT

In 2017, CityHealth first assessed America's largest cities on a package of tried and tested policy solutions that can help all people have an opportunity to live healthy, full lives. The results suggested a rich opportunity for policy change: less than half of cities (19 of 40) earned an overall medal, and just five cities earned an overall gold medal.

Since its inception, CityHealth has worked with city leaders to adopt upstream, prevention-oriented policies that can improve people's access to healthy choices and address critical health disparities in their communities. Over the years, and in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, city leaders across the country have responded by redefining what health means for their cities and have developed a greater understanding of how local action can create better health outcomes for everyone.

As CityHealth prepares to expand the policies it will review, 2021 marks the final assessment of its inaugural policy package. A clear achievement stands out: 37 of 40 (92.5%) of the country's largest cities have earned an overall medal, and the number of gold medal cities has doubled to 10. This dramatic increase in policy adoption shows that city leaders are joining the movement to improve health for all by creating opportunities for their residents to thrive.

BACKGROUND

CityHealth, an initiative of the de Beaumont Foundation and Kaiser Permanente, works to advance a package of evidence-based policy solutions that ensure all people have a safe place to live, a healthy body and mind, and a thriving environment. Working with visionary city leaders, CityHealth helps cities adopt policies that can make their communities healthier and more resilient — now and decades down the road.

CityHealth's policy solutions are based in research, are backed by qualified experts, and have been shown to have bipartisan support. From 2017 to 2021, CityHealth has rated

OVERALL RESULTS

Out of the nation's 40 largest cities, there were:



92.5%

of cities earned
an overall
medal in 2021
up from
47.5% in 2017



44.3

million people live in
a city that has earned
an overall medal
up from
29 million in 2017

the nation's 40 largest cities on their progress in adopting nine key policies and awards gold, silver, and bronze medals based on the combined strength and number of the policies they have in place. Learn about what's coming in 2022 at the end of this report.

KEY FINDINGS

In 2021, **37 of America's 40 largest cities (92.5%) earned an overall medal**, compared with 90% in 2020. That's nearly double the results of CityHealth's first assessment in 2017 (47.5%). More than 44 million people now live in a city that has earned an overall medal.

For the first time, **Albuquerque earned an overall gold medal**, joining nine other gold medal cities. Eleven cities earned an overall silver medal. Sixteen cities earned an overall bronze medal, including **Oklahoma City, which earned an overall medal for the first time**.

KEY FINDINGS: Policy Medals

America's largest cities earned three new policy medals in 2021, with Albuquerque earning a gold medal in earned sick leave, Oklahoma City earning a silver medal in Complete Streets, and San Jose earning a silver medal in affordable housing/inclusionary zoning.

Cities can earn gold, silver, or bronze medals depending on the number and strength of their policies in each area. For a full description of how medals are awarded for each policy and to learn about CityHealth's methodology, visit cityhealth.org.



Affordable Housing/ Inclusionary Zoning

Affordable housing promotes diverse, inclusive neighborhoods and positive mental health, reduces crowding and exposure to environmental hazards, and frees up resources for individuals to pay for other critical needs. CityHealth's assessment of affordable housing policies looks at cities' inclusionary zoning policies, which are planning ordinances that require developers to set aside a portion of housing units for low- and moderate-income residents.

CityHealth analyzed the size of developments covered by the law, what percentage of units must be made affordable, and whether the program is evaluated for its effectiveness.

**The state of affordable housing/
inclusionary zoning in the largest U.S. cities**

**13 of 40 cities received a medal for affordable housing/
inclusionary zoning policies, including
3 gold, 7 silver, and 3 bronze.**



Earned Sick Leave

Earned sick leave policies help reduce the spread of contagious illnesses, increase employment and income stability, and save cities money in health care costs. CityHealth rates the quality of earned sick leave policies based on how many family members and what size employers are covered by the law, as well as the number of hours of leave employees can earn.

Some cities face state preemption challenges with their earned sick leave policies. In March 2021, a federal district court blocked an earned sick leave ordinance in Dallas, ruling that the city's policy was preempted by Texas' minimum wage law. State district courts have also issued similar rulings for Austin and San Antonio's earned sick leave ordinances. Although these cities have taken action to adopt this policy, CityHealth does not award medals to cities that have been preempted, as their policies cannot get implemented and thus will not impact the lives of residents.

The state of earned sick leave laws in the largest U.S. cities

**22 of 40 cities received a medal for earned sick leave policies,
with 4 gold, 6 silver, and 12 bronze.**



Complete Streets

Complete Streets policies prioritize safety by incorporating the needs of all forms of transportation, from walking, to biking, to driving or taking the bus. These policies expand economic growth, improve individuals' health, and can save lives.

CityHealth's medal criteria for Complete Streets policies are based on whether they require compliance; whether they explicitly accommodate all ages, abilities, and modes of transportation; and whether the city assigns an agency to oversee implementation.

The state of complete streets policies in the largest U.S. cities
**38 of 40 cities received a medal for Complete Streets policies,
with 30 gold, and 7 silver, and 1 bronze.**



Food Safety/Restaurant Rating

Policies that require food establishments to publicly post food safety inspection grades empower consumers, reduce food-borne illness, and save on health care costs.

CityHealth found that strong policies in this area include routine inspections of food establishments, assignment of a rating, and public posting of those grades outside of the restaurants.

The state of food safety ratings policies in the largest U.S. cities

**15 of 40 cities received a medal for restaurant inspection
ratings policies, with 12 gold and 3 silver.**



Healthy Food Procurement

Policies that ensure food sold and served in city buildings meet basic nutritional standards can provide more residents with affordable and healthy food choices and may reduce some of the high medical costs associated with diet-related diseases.

Cities with strong healthy food procurement policies set and apply nutrition standards to all foods served and sold on city property.

The state of healthy procurement policies in the largest U.S. cities

19 of 40 cities received a medal for healthy procurement policies, with 9 gold, 7 silver, and 3 bronze.



Smoke-Free Indoor Air

These policies protect non-smokers from the harmful effects of tobacco — which is the largest preventable cause of death — and reduce smokers' consumption of tobacco at the same time.

The strongest policies ban indoor use of tobacco products in the most locations — such as workplaces and public spaces — while not exempting places like bars, restaurants, or any other public places.

The state of smoke-free indoor air policies in the largest U.S. cities

37 out of 40 cities received a medal for smoke-free indoor air policies, with 21 gold, 14 silver, and 2 bronze.



High-Quality, Accessible Pre-K

High-quality, accessible pre-K improves children's school readiness and success. Long-term benefits include higher high school graduation rates, lower rates of crime and teen pregnancy, higher lifetime earnings, and better health outcomes.

In partnership with the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), CityHealth assessed the availability of high-quality, accessible pre-K in large cities against research-based benchmarks that identify the minimum policies necessary for effective programs. CityHealth's medals applied NIEER's benchmarks, along with an assessment of the enrollment of 4-year-olds in the city's pre-K programs.

The state of high-quality, accessible pre-K in the largest U.S. cities

33 of 40 cities received a medal for high-quality, accessible pre-K policies, with 15 gold, 3 silver, and 15 bronze.



Tobacco 21

Policies that raise the minimum legal age for the sale of tobacco to 21 reduce the number of young people using these products, which greatly reduces their risk for addiction and disease.

Locally driven efforts have pushed Tobacco 21 adoption at the state and federal levels, culminating in the passage of federal Tobacco 21 legislation in December 2019. CityHealth awards credit to cities for laws passed that affect their jurisdiction, even if they are passed at a higher level of government (i.e., county, state, or federal). For this reason, all 40 cities were awarded gold medals in 2020 and have retained them in 2021.

The state of Tobacco 21 policies in the largest U.S. cities

40 of 40 cities received a medal for Tobacco 21 policies.



Safer Alcohol Sales

Policies that address a high density of alcohol outlets can reduce crime, increase safety, and reduce spending on health care and criminal justice costs.

Most cities have the authority to limit, suspend, revoke, or deny liquor or business licenses that can affect the number and location of outlets that sell alcohol. Cities can also use other local powers (such as zoning) to affect a wide range of service practices and activities in or near alcohol outlets.

The state of safer alcohol sales in the largest U.S. cities

16 of 40 cities received a medal for safer alcohol sales, with 8 gold and 8 silver.






OUR METHODS

America's largest cities face myriad challenges that impact the health and well-being of residents. CityHealth's policy package is not intended to be an exhaustive list to solve every pressing local problem; instead, the nine policies selected meet the specific criteria of being: 1) largely under city jurisdiction; 2) backed by evidence; 3) pragmatic, including a likelihood of gaining bipartisan support; and 4) replicable, having been successfully implemented in at least one U.S. jurisdiction.

CityHealth's 40-city assessment combines the input of national experts to determine the gold medal criteria for each policy with legal analysis by the Center for Public Health Law Research at Temple University's Beasley School of Law. Based on the laws in place, CityHealth identified which elements are necessary for a high-achieving policy (gold), a good policy (silver), and an acceptable policy (bronze). Cities with no policy, or a policy that did not meet the minimum requirements, received no medal. Additional content, including the complete policy criteria, methodology, and information about state-level preemption of certain policies, is available at cityhealth.org.

Overall Medal Criteria:

-  **GOLD:** the city received five or more gold medals across each of the nine policies.
-  **SILVER:** the city received five or more gold or silver medals across each of the nine policies.
-  **BRONZE:** the city received four or more gold, silver, or bronze medals across each of the nine policies.

WHAT'S NEXT

Starting in 2022, CityHealth will assess more cities on a new and expanded package of 12 policy solutions. CityHealth selected its new policy package following feedback from city leaders and after a comprehensive review of the latest data and evidence on effective policy solutions that are shown to improve community health. This expanded policy package sets a new standard for cities to aspire to and is designed to be responsive to the evolving challenges cities face today. CityHealth is also growing its footprint in 2022 to include the nation's largest 75 cities in its annual policy assessment. A complete list of the new policies and cities may be found [here](#).

The goal for CityHealth's annual assessment is for city leaders, policymakers, and advocates to use it as a tool to work together and move toward the gold medal criteria for each policy. These data are intended to serve as an accountability framework and to drive health improvements in cities. We invite city officials, community leaders, and others interested in advancing policies to engage with us at cityhealth.org/join-us.

2021 CITYHEALTH GOLD MEDAL CITIES

Albuquerque	Los Angeles	San Francisco
Atlanta	Louisville	Seattle
Boston	New York	
Chicago	San Antonio	

MEDALS

This is the 2021 assessment of how the nation's 40 largest cities rate in nine policy areas that have a proven impact on people's well-being and quality of life. [Learn more about each city at cityhealth.org](https://cityhealth.org)

CITYHEALTH, an initiative of the de Beaumont Foundation and Kaiser Permanente, works to advance a package of tried and tested policy solutions that ensure all people have access to healthy choices. Together with visionary city leaders, CityHealth helps cities adopt policies that can make their communities healthy and resolve critical health disparities — now and decades down the road. [Learn more at cityhealth.org.](https://cityhealth.org)

	2021 OVERALL MEDAL	AFFORDABLE HOUSING/ INCLUSIONARY ZONING	COMPLETE STREETS	EARNED SICK LEAVE	FOOD SAFETY/RESTAURANT RATING	HEALTHY FOOD PROCUREMENT	HIGH-QUALITY, ACCESSIBLE PRE-K	SAFER ALCOHOL SALES	SMOKE-FREE INDOOR AIR	TOBACCO 21
Albuquerque										
Atlanta										
Austin										
Baltimore										
Boston										
Charlotte										
Chicago										
Columbus										
Dallas										
Denver										
Detroit										
El Paso										
Ft. Worth										
Fresno										
Houston										
Indianapolis										
Jacksonville										
Kansas City										
Las Vegas										
Long Beach										
Los Angeles										
Louisville										
Memphis										
Mesa										
Milwaukee										
Nashville										
New York										
Oklahoma City										
Philadelphia										
Phoenix										
Portland										
Sacramento										
San Antonio										
San Diego										
San Francisco										
San Jose										
Seattle										
Tucson										
Virginia Beach										
Washington, D.C.										

= city improved overall medal status since 2020.



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