



CASE STUDY

Saint Paul Leads in Restricting Kids' Access to All Flavored Tobacco Products

Ending the sale of all flavored tobacco products — including flavored e-cigarettes, menthol cigarettes, flavored cigars, and hookah tobacco — will help end the youth e-cigarette epidemic, reduce youth tobacco use, and advance racial and health equity. Local elected leaders do not have to wait for state or federal action and can lead by clearing the market of all flavored tobacco products.

BACKGROUND: Saint Paul — A Diverse City

Saint Paul, the capital of Minnesota, has more than 311,000 residents and is the second largest city in the state. According to the 2020 census, the city's population is majority non-white, with more than 19% of residents identifying as Asian and 17% as Black or African American. Nearly 25% of the city's population is under the age of 18. Saint Paul has a long history of passing strong commercial tobacco policies aimed at reducing youth access and addiction. When a diverse and broad community health coalition — led by youth advocates and Black residents — asked the city council to end the sale of flavored tobacco, the council took action.

POLICY ADOPTION: Lessons Learned

To find compromise between the community health coalition and local businesses, the city council voted in 2016 to restrict the sale of flavored tobacco products — but created an exception for menthol-flavored products. After the ordinance passed, flavored tobacco was only permitted for sale in “age-restricted” stores. The restriction was intended to reduce accessibility by limiting the number of stores selling flavored tobacco. In 2017, the city council updated this ordinance to include menthol products. At the time, the community coalition intentionally designed a two-phased campaign to tackle candy- and fruit-flavored



AN INITIATIVE OF

the de Beaumont Foundation + Kaiser Permanente

“If we had this to do over again, I believe we would have completely banned the sale of flavored tobacco products in our city. It would have saved a vast amount of council and staff time, it would have avoided unintended consequences and I believe it would have saved lives.”

Saint Paul Councilmember
Jane Prince in testimony to
the Colorado House Health
and Insurance Committee,
March 2022



tobacco products first with the promise of adding menthol shortly after, which they did with strong support from the council.

The attempt at compromise resulted in retailers circumventing the policy’s intent and exploiting loopholes. For example, “store splitting” became prevalent, as multiple tobacco outlets applied for an adult-only license to split their store in two — with one side operating as a convenience store and the other side becoming an age-restricted tobacco product shop. In response, the city enhanced the original ordinance, capping the number of tobacco licenses and the number of outlets allowed to sell flavored tobacco. The city also redoubled its retailer education and enforcement activities.

As a pioneer and early adopter of flavored tobacco restrictions, the city council has shared its experiences and lessons learned with other elected officials around the country — encouraging other cities to pass comprehensive policies to end the sale of all flavored tobacco products, without exemptions.

OUTCOMES: Leading Saint Paul to Better Health

The impact of Saint Paul’s flavored tobacco policy was immediate and far-reaching. The number of tobacco outlets allowed to sell flavored tobacco **fell from 261 in 2016 to under 40 in 2022**. The city’s experience helped pave the way for many other cities and counties to pass strong flavored tobacco policies. In close partnership with the community, the city continues to pioneer innovative solutions to curb youth tobacco initiation. By passing smart policies that protect young people and address disparities, Saint Paul’s actions are both good for health and popular with the public.

Learn more at cityhealth.org