

# 2024 POLICY ASSESSMENT

Across many U.S. cities, 2024 has been a year of recovery and rebound. As COVID-era funds wind down, cities are pursuing new and sustainable funding sources for critical infrastructure and investments in healthier communities, paving the way for long-term progress and resilience. Cities are adapting to shifting political headwinds while health-focused measures on state and local ballots reflect a strong commitment to improving well-being in our communities. To meet the moment, CityHealth and its partners formed new relationships with city leaders and staff — laying the groundwork for policy adoption this year and into the future.

Cities made progress in several areas as a result of targeted policy efforts. Earned Sick Leave, High-Quality, Accessible Pre-K, Greenspace, and Complete Streets saw a total of 41 new or improved policy medals in 2024. These policy wins helped drive an increase in overall medals — including eight new silver medal cities and one new bronze medal city.

CityHealth forms long-term partnerships with cities to help them achieve their policy goals. Policymaking is often a deliberative and incremental process, with some efforts taking years to come to fruition. For example, CityHealth and technical assistance partners began working with San Antonio in 2020 on the city's Complete Streets ordinance. The city updated the ordinance this year after a long process of soliciting community input, consulting with experts, and strengthening the policy to ensure the ordinance was equitable and sustainable — earning the city an individual gold policy medal.

While policymaking takes time, local leaders made significant progress this year. Greenspace saw considerable movement in 2024, with cities including Austin, Dallas, Fort Worth, Miami and Santa Ana earning new gold medals in this policy area. Similarly, Complete Streets saw momentum, as Nashville, Newark, San Antonio, and St. Louis earned new medals for their policies. Looking forward, many cities are well-positioned to continue taking policy action in the coming year.

# **OVERALL RESULTS**

Out of the nation's 75 largest cities, there were:







gold medal

silver medal cities

bronze medal cities

did not have enough strong policies to warrant a medal

**63**%

of America's 75 largest cities (47 of 75) earned an overall medal in 2024



43<sub>MILLION</sub>

people live in a city that has earned an overall medal

# +500,000 people compared to 2023

Seven exemplary cities rise to the top by earning overall gold medals: **Boston, Denver, Minneapolis, New Orleans, Portland, San Antonio,** and **St. Louis** — each of which also earned an overall gold medal in 2023.

Nine cities showed progress by improving their medals in 2024, including eight that moved from overall bronze medals to overall silver medals — **Albuquerque**, **Aurora**, **Baltimore**, **Lincoln**, **Long Beach**, **Sacramento**, **San Diego**, and **Santa Ana**. One city, **Omaha**, earned its first overall medal, a bronze.

CityHealth remains dedicated to partnering with cities to advance health and equity — and to supporting visionary local leaders taking bold actions on transformative policies. CityHealth will continue to offer policy support and technical assistance to help communities turn aspirations into impactful, lasting public health improvements. Together, we can build stronger, healthier cities for all.

In 2024, America's 75 largest cities earned 422 individual policy medals (+6%) across all 12 policies, including 161 (+7%) gold medals, 113 (+15%) silver medals, and 148 (-3%) bronze medals.

#### **422 TOTAL POLICY MEDALS**







gold medals

silver medals

bronze medals

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 CityHealth awards medals for each policy and to learn about its methodology, visit cityhealth.org or see the 2024 Report Methodology accompanying this assessment. The methodology also contains information on preemption, a legal principle that allows a higher level of government to limit or eliminate the power of a lower level of government to regulate a specific issue.





#### **Complete Streets**

Complete Streets policies balance people's needs and safety across all forms of transportation, including walking, biking, public transit, and cars. From street lighting to bike lanes to crosswalks, these policies ensure that all residents have safe, convenient ways of getting around and staying active. All people from all neighborhoods should have access to Complete Streets that help them get where they need to go, live, play, and grow.

CityHealth's assessed cities' Complete Streets policies with criteria that include measures to prioritize vulnerable users, ensure compliance, and collect and publicize equity data.







gold medals

silver medals

bronze medals

30 of 75 cities earned a medal for Complete Streets (+15%)



# **Affordable Housing Trusts**

Affordable Housing Trusts are a community-driven way for cities to invest in building and maintaining affordable housing for everyone. These trusts receive ongoing dedicated sources of public funding to support the preservation and production of affordable housing and increase opportunities for families and individuals to access quality affordable homes.

CityHealth assessed cities' Affordable Housing Trusts policies using criteria that include multi-stakeholder oversight requirements, diversity in funding sources, and regular evaluation and public reporting.







gold medals

silver medals

bronze medals

46 of 75 cities earned a medal for Affordable Housing Trusts (+5%)

"My administration is dedicated to adopting policies that enhance the overall health and well-being of the City of Long Beach and its residents. Fine-tuning and updating policies that improve quality of life is a simple yet impactful step for our city."

- Long Beach Mayor Rex Richardson



#### **Earned Sick Leave**

Earned Sick Leave policies require employers to allow employees to take paid time off for illness or injury for themselves or their family members. Done well, these policies can reduce the spread of contagious illnesses, increase employment and income stability, and save cities money in health care costs. Cities that require companies to offer Earned Sick Leave ensure that all employees feel secure in their jobs when they fall ill—and keep communities healthy by stopping the spread of contagious illness.

CityHealth assessed cities' Earned Sick Leave policies with criteria that include the ability for workers to use Earned Sick Leave to care for family members or recover from domestic violence, the minimum of sick time a worker can earn, and the size of businesses covered under the local law.







gold medals

silver medals

bronze medals

41 of 75 cities earned a medal for Earned Sick Leave (+13%)



# **Eco-Friendly Purchasing**

Eco-Friendly Purchasing policies help to limit exposure to toxic chemicals in city-owned buildings. Since cities collectively spend billions of dollars every year purchasing potentially toxic products, prioritizing the city's selection of less harmful products in three categories — cleaning supplies, foodware, and furnishings — enables leaders to use the power of city procurement to impact health. When city leaders buy eco-friendly products for city buildings, they make it clear that the health of our communities and our environment is worth protecting.

CityHealth assessed cities' Eco-Friendly Purchasing policies with criteria that include annual reporting requirements, adherence to independent standards, and the inclusion of all requests for proposals (RFPs) and contracts.







gold medals silver medals bronze medals

18 of 75 cities earned a medal for Eco-Friendly Purchasing (no change)



#### Flavored Tobacco Restrictions

Flavored Tobacco Restrictions policies prohibit all retailers from selling flavored tobacco products — including flavored e-cigarettes and menthol cigarettes — to protect the health of our communities. Prohibiting the sale of flavored tobacco products can reduce use of these dangerous and addictive products and supports the well-being of everyone — especially young people.

CityHealth assessed cities' Flavored Tobacco Restrictions policies with criteria that include prohibiting the sale of three categories of tobacco products: menthol cigarettes; flavored e-cigarettes and vaping devices; and other flavored tobacco products including cigars, cigarillos, dipping tobacco, chew, and hookah.







gold medals silver medals

bronze medals

21 of 75 cities earned a medal for Flavored Tobacco Restrictions (no change)



#### Greenspace

Public greenspaces, from parks to trails to public commons, help families be healthier in body and mind and keep our environment thriving. Greenspace policies can expand equitable access to parks, increase tree canopy, and reduce pollution. These policies ensure all families, not just a few, have access to public land, nature, and their benefits.

CityHealth assessed cities' Greenspace policies with criteria that include measurable goals to expand park access or tree canopy, park and greenspace spending levels, and the prioritization of underserved and disinvested neighborhoods.







gold medals

silver medals

dals bronze medals

54 of 75 cities earned a medal for Greenspace (+4%)



"I want my children to be proud of the city that we're protecting for future generations. You can't do that without a master plan that really honors and respects what urban forestry looks like in the city of Fort Worth."

- Fort Worth Mayor Mattie Parker



# **Healthy Food Purchasing**

Healthy Food Purchasing policies set standards for the food available for purchase on city property. These policies can help ensure that healthy food options are available in city-owned or controlled places and give city residents food choices that can help them achieve and maintain a healthy weight. Cities that prioritize health in their food purchases increase access to healthy choices — and can use their purchasing power to lead by example.

CityHealth assessed cities' Healthy Food Purchasing policies with criteria that include mandating nutrition standards and which venues the policy applies to.







gold medals

silver medals

bronze medals

27 of 75 cities earned a medal for Healthy Food Purchasing (+8%)



# **Healthy Rental Housing**

Health Rental Housing — also known as "proactive rental inspection" — policies have a strong evidence base that shows the link between potential health harms within rental properties and the ability to proactively inspect and remediate these harms. These policies can help detect lifethreatening toxins like mold and asbestos, and have a strong upstream prevention focus that could prevent poor health problems before they start.

CityHealth assessed cities' Healthy Rental Housing policies with criteria that include the interval and location of inspections, landlord payment of registration or inspection fees, and evaluation and reporting requirements.







gold medals silver medals bronze medals
24 of 75 cities earned a medal for Healthy Rental Housing
(no change)



# High-Quality, Accessible Pre-K

Done right, all children benefit from early childhood education, regardless of family income or zip code. CityHealth's assessment of High-Quality, Accessible Pre-K programs evaluates 10 quality benchmarks established by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), as well as measures around access, local funding, and data collection. When all families have access to high-quality pre-K, more children have the opportunity to succeed as they begin their educational journeys.

CityHealth assessed cities' High-Quality, Accessible Pre-K policies with criteria that include the number of NIEER quality benchmarks the program meets, access thresholds, collection of equity data, and inclusion of local funding.







gold medals

silver medals

bronze medals

73 of 75 cities earned a medal for High-Quality, Accessible Pre-K (+9%)



## **Legal Support for Renters**

Most renters lack the means to obtain legal representation when faced with eviction, preventing them from fully benefiting from the legal protections they're entitled to. Legal Support for Renters — also known as "right to counsel" — policies ensure all eligible tenants have access to full legal representation, which substantially improves the likelihood that residents will stay in their homes; or, if they must move, that they will have more time to find new housing and a lower risk of homelessness. These policies also help renters keep their records free from evictions and can help reduce rent debt.

CityHealth assessed cities' Legal Support for Renters policies with criteria that include eligibility requirements, degree of coverage, and evaluation and reporting.







gold medals silver medals by

bronze medals

17 of 75 cities earned a medal for Legal Support for Renters (+6%)



#### Smoke-Free Indoor Air

Cities can put people's health first by ensuring that businesses and other indoor spaces remain free from the smoke and vapor from tobacco (including e-cigarettes and heated tobacco products) and cannabis. Smoke-Free Indoor Air policies protect non-smokers from the harmful effects of tobacco and reduce smokers' consumption of tobacco at the same time. Casinos, gaming venues, multi-unit housing, and bars — or any other public space we enjoy with family and friends — should have clean air to protect everyone's health.

CityHealth assessed cities' Smoke-Free Indoor Air policies with criteria that include the types of workplaces and venues the policy applies to and the inclusion of vaping and marijuana.







gold medals silver medals

bronze medals

37 out of 75 cities earned a medal for Smoke-Free Indoor Air policies (no change)



#### Safer Alcohol Sales

When communities have smart policies and practices around alcohol sales, it helps keep everyone safer — and physically and mentally healthier — by reducing excessive drinking and related violence. Safer Alcohol Sales policies put cities in charge of the location and practices of alcohol retailers. Policies that govern where, when, and how alcohol may be sold in a neighborhood can reduce crime, increase safety, and decrease spending on health care and criminal justice.

CityHealth assessed cities' Safer Alcohol Sales policies with criteria that include coverage of all alcohol sales, ability to address public health and safety, and enforcement.





gold medals

silver medals

34 of 75 cities earned a medal for Safer Alcohol Sales (no change)



#### **OUR METHODS**

CityHealth's policy package was developed in consultation with local leaders, public health experts, researchers, and members of the business community. Twelve health-related, equitable policies were selected that benefit people's health, well-being, and quality of life. These policies and their associated criteria were chosen with the following guiding principles in mind: 1) Policies demonstrate evidence of health impact; 2) Policies are largely under city jurisdictional authority; 3) Policies are replicable, having been successfully adopted in at least one of the 75 largest cities; 4) Policies are pragmatic, including a likelihood of gaining bipartisan support; and 5) Policies employ "best practices," with criteria recommended by subject matter experts and implementation partners.

To award medals, the Center for Public Health Law Research at Temple University's Beasley School of Law and other evaluation partners performed policy surveillance, the systematic collection and analysis of laws of public health significance, based on the criteria established for each policy. Medals are awarded for highachieving policies (gold), good policies (silver), and acceptable policies (bronze). Cities with no policy, or a policy that did not meet the minimum requirements, received no medal. CityHealth's assessment also includes information about relevant county and statelevel laws impacting city policy adoption. Additional information, including all policy criteria, methodology, and data on state-level preemption, is available at cityhealth.org.

#### **EMERGING TRENDS**

As cities adapt to expiring COVID-era recovery funds, programs that proved popular during the pandemic are becoming more permanently established as policy. Greenspace policies, which saw a renewed wave of interest as residents sought access to nature to make social connections and improve mental health during the pandemic, saw nine cities earning new medals in 2024 — with a total of 72% of all cities earning a medal.

Greenspace was also used as a policy intervention in cities experiencing extreme heat, as tree canopy has been shown to lower neighborhood temperatures and provide residents with a cool respite — particularly in communities that have seen disinvestment due to inequitable housing and zoning policies. Fort Worth received a gold Greenspace medal this year with its Urban Forest Master Plan, which emphasized providing equitable access to residents. Similarly, Dallas and Austin earned gold medals in part due to increasing investments and reinterpreting existing policy.

Earned Sick Leave policies also saw a large increase in policy penetration, with 17 cities earning new or improved medals in 2024 — due in part to a state law in California and ballot referenda in Alaska, Missouri, and Nebraska. Pandemic-era protections that allowed workers to take time off to recover from illness or care for an ailing family member proved particularly popular.

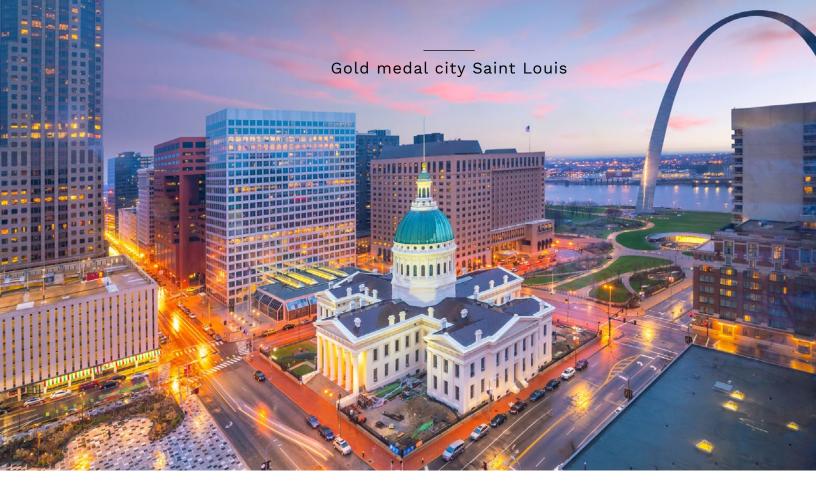
## PREEMPTION EFFORTS GROW

Cities continue to navigate state preemption efforts to influence local policymaking, particularly in areas such as housing and workplace protections. In the 2024 election cycle, ballot referenda were successfully used to combat preemption efforts in some cities and states. In New Orleans, voters approved a ballot measure to allow the city to adopt Affordable Housing Trusts in an effort to bypass state preemption banning inclusionary zoning. Similarly, voters approved a referendum in Missouri to adopt Earned Sick Leave protections, which was previously preempted under state law.

To thwart potential preemption efforts, some cities are pursuing temporary pilots or programs rather than permanent ordinances. In 2022, Atlanta's program to provide access to legal counsel was enacted as a pilot program because the city was preempted from instituting a full policy. During the pandemic, Phoenix also launched a pilot program establishing a right-to-counsel called the "Tenant Eviction Assistance Project," which provides free legal representation to certain low-income residents. With federal funding expiring in December 2025, the city is thinking creatively about ways to transition its pilot program into durable policy.

#### **OPPORTUNITY IN 2025**

With a new political environment and fresh policymaking energy, cities stand ready to capitalize on key policy



opportunities in the coming year. CityHealth policy solutions supporting housing affordability and stability — Affordable Housing Trusts, Healthy Rental Housing, and Legal Support for Renters — will likely be a priority for city leaders as they continue to navigate the housing crisis. In particular, momentum for Legal Support for Renters policies may grow as evictions have recently risen in the U.S. as rents have increased, COVID-era restrictions fully expire, and other cities with right-to-counsel policies continue to show success.

Other areas that may see policy action next year include Flavored Tobacco Restrictions as cities respond to uncertainty or delays with ongoing federal regulatory processes. Similarly, policies with higher uptake, such as Complete Streets and Greenspace, will likely see local movement as city leaders seek to enhance their cities' competitiveness and resident well-being.

## **NEXT STEPS**

CityHealth's goal is that all city leaders will use this assessment as a tool to work together and move toward the gold standard for each policy. These data are intended to serve as an accountability framework, giving residents, policymakers, and community leaders the tools to drive health improvements in their cities.

## EARNING AN OVERALL MEDAL

GOLD







**BRONZE** 





NO MEDAL

Cities must earn **5 or** more gold medals across the 12 policies

Cities must earn 5 or more gold or silver medals across the 12 policies

Cities must earn 5 or more gold, silver, or bronze medals across the 12 policies

Cities that received less than 5 medals across the 12 policies were not awarded an overall medal

CityHealth works with subject matter experts, technical assistance partners, communications specialists, and government relations professionals to support cities in adopting the policy package and celebrating their achievements. To connect with CityHealth and access the many resources available for cities, we invite you to connect with us at cityhealth.org/join-us.

# **MEDALS**

This is the 2024 assessment of how the nation's 75 largest cities rate in 12 policy areas. Learn more about each city at cityhealth.org

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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.



# cityhealth.org



