

Retail tobacco policy efforts and barriers to implementation in the US: Insights from local practitioners

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Advancing Science & Practice in the Retail Environment

BACKGROUND

The Tobacco Retail Environment

Problem

Most tobacco is purchased from neighborhood stores, where tobacco companies spend more than \$1 million an hour to advertise and promote their products.

Communities have become hubs of local retail policy innovation, but more information is needed about **why some communities succeed and others do not** in implementing retail policies.

Advancing Science & Practice in the Retail Environment

The ASPiRE Center is an NCI-funded collaborative of tobacco control researchers, practitioners, and legal experts sharing evidence with communities on scientifically sound, legally defensible, and practically feasible retail policies by sharing evidence about what works.



METHODS

To better understand retail policy progress and roadblocks, the ASPiRE Center interviewed 30 local tobacco control managers or coalition members in large US cities in 2019 about:

- Retail policy priorities and activity on 22 specific local-level policies
- Barriers and opposition to implementing policies
- Helpful and needed resources

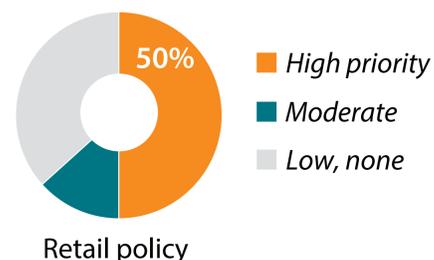
Statistical and thematic analysis strategies were used to summarize data.

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RESULTS

Local Policy Activity

Most respondents (20 of 30) reported placing **high or moderate priority** on retail policy, second only to cessation services in their programs.



Implementation Barriers

Policy Adoption

The most common barriers experienced by cities were **lack of political will** to address tobacco industry influence in the retail environment and **industry opposition** through lobbying, litigation, or influence on legislative proposals.

“The biggest challenge is how to make it a bread-and-butter issue for community members and elected officials.”

Enforcement

In cities with high levels of retail policy activity, retailers took **deliberate action to avoid enforcement**, such as hiding products out of sight or physically altering stores to identify as adult-only retailers. Cities with lower policy activity reported **inadequate funding and staff** for enforcement and **competing priorities** among those tasked with enforcement.

“One of the primary challenges is that law enforcement never has the staff. They’re notoriously short on funding and people power.”

“They’re going to prioritize problems that seem more urgent. Drug, alcohol, and violence problems are always going to take precedence.”

Retailer licensing in 30 cities



Tobacco 21 in 30 cities



Cities had implemented an **average of 2.7 policies** to date. The most activity among the 30 cities was in **retailer licensing & Tobacco 21**. Other popular policies were flavored product sales restrictions and retailer buffers around schools.

Resources

Helpful Resources

Partnerships were key to implementing retail policies, including **council member** support, **youth advocate** testimony, and expertise from **national organizations**. Cities also looked to places with more retail policy activity as models.

Needed Resources

Cities at all levels need more **research and evaluation data** on the need for and effectiveness of retail policies.

Those more active in retail policy also wanted **case studies** to learn about retail policy efforts in other cities.

IMPLICATIONS

Environmental and system-level barriers present substantial challenges to local retail tobacco control policy implementation. Efforts in other public health policy areas, such as obesity and diabetes prevention, may face similar roadblocks. The expertise of D&I researchers presents a unique opportunity to move beyond these roadblocks by:

• Assessing local policy implementation

D&I researchers can apply an implementation science lens to the challenges of local policy implementation, assessing contextual and process factors that hinder or support policy development and implementation.

• Disseminating examples of success

Other cities are likely to follow these changemakers and face similar barriers as they pursue retail policy strategies. Case studies on successful retail tobacco policy implementation could help cities across the country understand how to replicate their success.

Key Findings

- Cities prioritize retail policy, but progress is slow
- Lack of political will & industry activity hamper policy work
- Enforcement challenges vary by policy activity level
- Practitioners need more data and case studies

Visit aspirecenter.org to read and download **Tobacco Retail Policy Trends 2019**, a set of briefs based on these findings.

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