

Limiting Where Menthol Cigarettes Are Sold and Reducing the Number of Tobacco Retailers Has Great Potential to Reduce Health Disparities in Minnesota

Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death in the world.¹ At least 380,000 stores in the U.S. sell tobacco products.^{2,3} The proximity of retailers that sell tobacco has a direct impact on people's use of these products.⁴ Menthol cigarettes are directly tied to kids starting smoking and adults not being able to quit.⁵

The Tobacco Town Minnesota (TTMN) project is a collaboration between researchers at the Brookings Institution, the Public Health Law Center, and Washington University, funded by a research grant from ClearWaySM

Project takeaways that policy makers should consider:

- Prohibiting the sale of menthol cigarettes in all stores except tobacco specialty shops is likely to have a much greater impact on advancing health equity than a buffer-zone policy around landmarks (e.g., no menthol cigarette sales within 1500 feet of schools).
- Prohibiting the sale of all cigarettes in all stores except tobacco specialty shops is likely to have a greater impact on advancing health equity than simply focusing on menthol cigarettes. Such a sales restriction could also reduce tobacco use in all community types (e.g., urban and rural) and in all populations (e.g., priority and overall).
- Of the policies tested, the combination with the greatest potential to reduce cigarette smoking among African-American and LGBTQ populations in low-income urban, suburban, and rural communities in Minnesota would prohibit the sale of all or of menthol cigarettes in all stores except tobacco specialty shops and prevent any tobacco retailer from being located within 2000 feet of another. This type of policy also is most likely to reduce tobacco use in the general population in all Minnesota communities.



Characterized potential reduced tobacco use, due to increasing costs over time.

Minnesota (RC-2017-0010). The research team used computer simulations to examine the impact of cigarette sales restrictions in six types of communities in Minnesota.

Four policies were tested alone and in combination with each other:

- Restricting the sale of menthol cigarettes;
- Limiting the types of stores in which cigarettes can be sold;
- Limiting how close tobacco retailers can be to each other; and
- Limiting how close tobacco retailers can be to landmarks, such as schools

An interactive dashboard with more model details and results is available at <https://tobaccotown.shinyapps.io/Minnesota>.

In Minnesota ...

- Low-income adults are nearly three times as likely to smoke (24.4%) than their high-income peers (8.7%).⁶
- LGBTQ persons are nearly twice as likely to smoke (25.7%) as the general adult population (14.4%).⁶
- 21% of African-American adults smoke, are about 3.5 times more likely to use menthol cigarettes (88%) than the general adult population (25.1%), and are more likely than non-Latino whites to die of lung cancer and heart disease.⁶

Endnotes

- 1 WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION, *WHO Report on the Global Tobacco Epidemic* (2017).
- 2 Center for Public Health Systems Science, *Point-of-Sale Report to the Nation: The Tobacco Retail and Policy Landscape*, Washington Univ. St. Louis and National Cancer Institute, State and Community Tobacco Control Research Initiative (2014) (estimating 375,000 tobacco retailers in the U.S., not including retailers that only sell e-cigarettes).
- 3 U.S. Dep't of Health and Human Servs., Food and Drug Administration, *Deeming Tobacco Products to be Subject to the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act, as Amended by the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act: Final Regulatory Impact Analysis* (2016), <https://www.fda.gov/downloads/AboutFDA/ReportsManualsForms/Reports/EconomicAnalyses/UCM500254.pdf> (estimating that between 5,000 and 10,000 U.S. retailers sold only e-cigarettes).
- 4 U.S. Dep't of Health and Human Servs., Ctrs. for Disease Control and Prevention, *Preventing Tobacco Use Among Youth and Young Adults: A Report of the Surgeon General* (2012).
- 5 Andrea Villanti et al., *Menthol Cigarettes and the Public Health Standard: A Systematic Review*, 17 BMC PUBLIC HEALTH 983 (2017), <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s12889-017-4987-z>.
- 6 Minnesota Dep't of Health, Tobacco Data. http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/hpcd/tpc/docs/tobacco_data.pdf