The Likely Impact of Limiting Where Menthol Cigarettes Are Sold in Minnesota

Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death in the world. At least 380,000 stores in the U.S. sell tobacco products. The proximity of retailers that sell tobacco has a direct impact on people’s use of these products. In addition, menthol cigarettes are directly tied to kids starting smoking and adults not being able to quit.

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 Minnesota (RC-2017-0010).

Project takeaways that policymakers 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).
- Combining a policy that prohibits the sale of menthol cigarettes in all stores except tobacco specialty shops with a buffer-zone policy that sets a minimum distance between retailers (e.g., 2000 feet) would likely have the greatest impact on reducing menthol cigarette use through increasing overall costs among African-American and low-income smokers, as well as the general population of smokers.

Potential overall cost (travel + price) increases for example menthol restrictions. While the overall population sees the highest increases, subsequent relative costs could be more equitable. Note: landmark buffer policy based on average school density.
Four types of 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%) as their high-income peers (8.7%).
- LGBTQ persons are nearly twice as likely to smoke (25.7%) as the general adult population (14.4%).
- 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.

Endnotes

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).