

# Vermont Tobacco Control Program

Annual Program Review | Fiscal year 2021 (July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021)



*OVX youth rally on February 11, 2020*

# COVID-19 and tobacco trends

## Recent trends jeopardize progress made prior to the pandemic

**Health debt** is the “accumulated impact of changes in health behaviors during the pandemic that will have long-term negative effects on health.”<sup>1</sup> In Vermont, a recently published finding from the Policy and Communication Evaluation (PACE) Vermont study found that **more than 60% of youth and young adult participants reported negative effects of COVID-19 on their wellbeing**; those that experienced high COVID-19 related stressors were more likely to have used e-cigarettes in the past 30 days.<sup>2</sup>



### COVID-19 & the “lost year” of trying to quit

Several reviews and a meta-analysis found that use of tobacco, whether by smoking or chewing, was related to severe COVID-19 symptoms.<sup>3,4</sup> The American Lung Association highlighted the disparate impact of both smoking and COVID-19 on racial, ethnic, and sexual minorities.<sup>5</sup>

In parallel, there have been decreases in use of evidence-based cessation activities since the start of the pandemic. An article in the Journal of the American Medical Association coined this period as a “lost year” of trying to quit tobacco.<sup>6</sup>



**20%** decrease in physician referrals to quitlines nationally<sup>6</sup>



**27%** decrease nationally in use of quitlines<sup>6</sup>



**24%** decrease in use of Vermont’s quitline, 802Quits<sup>7</sup>



### Trends in cigarette sales & e-cigarette tax revenue are concerning

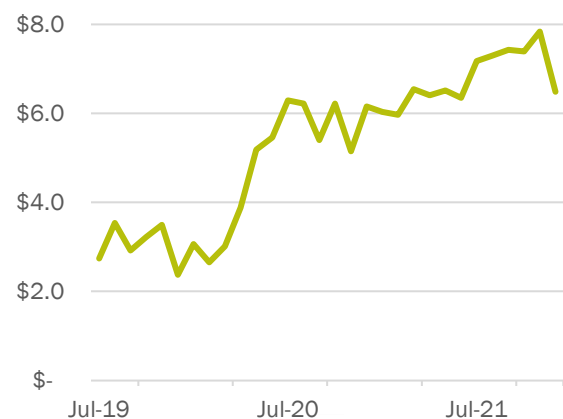
**For the first time in 20 years, the U.S. saw an increase in cigarette sales**, up 0.8 billion cigarettes for a total of 203.7 billion cigarettes sold in 2020.<sup>8</sup>

Tobacco advertising and promotion increased to \$7.84 billion nationally, with 77% of this spending provided to cigarette retailers to reduce the price to consumers.

**National e-cigarette sales hit record highs during the pandemic**, increasing nearly 50% between February 2020 and November 2021.<sup>9</sup>

**Revenue from Vermont’s e-cigarette tax**, implemented in 2019, **has also increased since the start of the pandemic** (see figure to the right).

Vermont e-cigarette tax revenue (in hundreds of thousands)<sup>10</sup>



# Steps toward reducing disparities

## Spotlight on LGBTQ+ Vermonters

**Disparities in access** to wealth, education, health care, housing, transportation, and social support contribute to higher tobacco use among many communities, including LGBTQ+ Vermonters, BIPOC, lower income Vermonters, and youth and young adults. The tobacco industry also heavily markets in these communities, further driving higher rates of tobacco use. The Vermont Tobacco Control Program (TCP) has dedicated resources to partner with **two organizations serving LGBTQ+ Vermonters**.



### Successes in reaching LGBTQ+ Vermonters

Tobacco use among LGBTQ+ Vermonters is no longer significantly higher from that of the general population.<sup>11</sup> One key activity contributing to this success is a partnership between the TCP and the Pride Center of Vermont (PCVT) to:

- **Educate** the LGBTQ+ community about the impacts of tobacco use
- **Connect** the LGBTQ+ community with 802Quits
- **Train** health care providers on working with LGBTQ+ Vermonters
- **Enlist** providers to join the Vermont Diversity Health Project, made up of providers who are committed to being a safe place for those in the LGBTQ+ community.

In one quarter (April – June 2021) the Pride Center:<sup>12</sup>

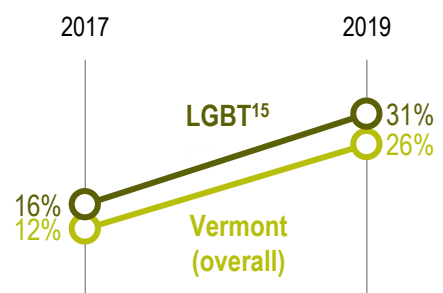
- **31** Tobacco Treatment Specialists were **educated** during a virtual LGBTQ+ Best Practices training.
- **1,025** unique people were **reached** on social media channels, in a promotion highlighting quit tools and resources.
- **202** providers **uploaded** to the Vermont Diversity Health Project Application.



### Skill building and social supports for LGBTQ+ youth in Vermont

LGBTQ+ youth remain at higher risk for tobacco initiation.<sup>13</sup> Outright Vermont works upstream, building social support groups for LGBTQ+ youth in Vermont to build community and resilience as a path to addressing higher rates of substance abuse and poor mental health in this population. Further, Outright Vermont conducts professional development with adults who interact with youth, including mental health professionals, health care providers, teachers and administrators in K-12 school systems.

Past 30-day use of electronic vapor products has increased and are significantly higher for LGBT youth<sup>14</sup>



# Flavored tobacco products play a central role in increasing tobacco use

## Flavors make it easier to start, harder to quit

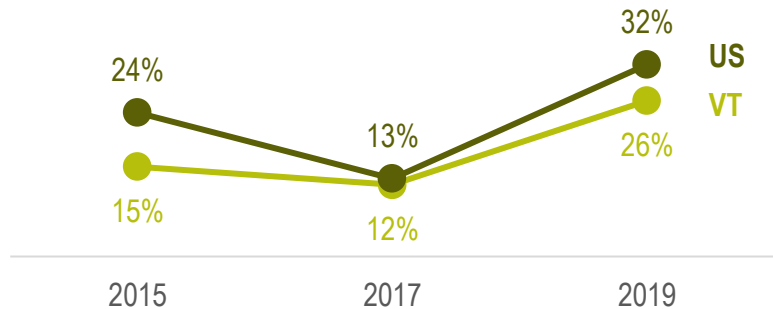


### Electronic vapor product use and flavors are increasing among youth

Flavors are a driving factor in young people's initiation.<sup>14</sup> Electronic vapor products require the user to purchase a pod, cartridge, or bottle of e-liquid, most of which come in a variety of flavors. The PACE Vermont study found that the most common flavors used by a sample of 240 Vermont teens (ages 12-17) and 633 young adults (ages 18-25) were fruit, menthol, and mint.<sup>18</sup>

Flavored tobacco in products is an urgent concern. Nationally, from 2019 to 2020, the proportion of current e-cigarette users using flavored e-cigarettes increased from 68.8% to 82.9%.<sup>17</sup> **In Vermont, 15% of youth younger than 13 tried a flavored tobacco product, higher than alcohol, marijuana, or cigarette use.**<sup>14</sup> This is a significant increase from 10% in 2017 to 15% in 2019.

Past 30-day use of electronic vapor products among youth in Vermont<sup>14</sup> and the US increased sharply in 2019<sup>16</sup>



We all know that **sweet, candy-like flavored tobacco products increase the appeal to young, inexperienced smokers**, with the data showing the highest use of menthol and other flavored tobacco products is amongst 12-17 year-olds. Studies show that the reward centers of the young brain are particularly vulnerable to the effects of nicotine and **those who are exposed to nicotine at a young age are more likely to become adult smokers.**<sup>19</sup>

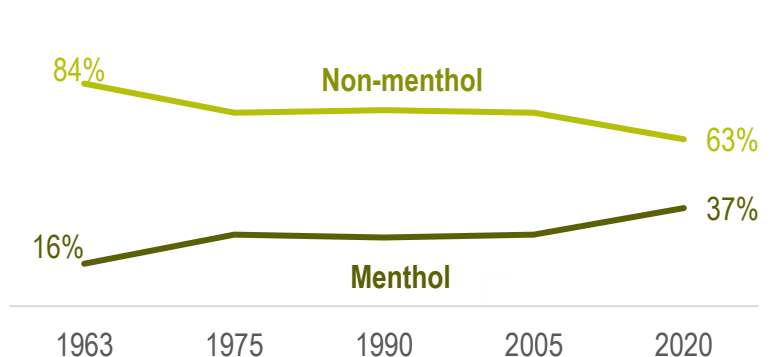
- L.E. Faricy, M.D., Pediatric Pulmonologist at UVMHC, search YouTube for [video link](#)



### Addressing flavors in tobacco is a social justice issue

In Black communities, after decades of tobacco industry targeted marketing, nearly 90% of people who smoke use menthol cigarettes.<sup>20</sup> The TCP is currently partnering with the Vermont NAACP to develop activities to reach BIPOC Vermonters; this will be evaluated and reported in the fiscal year 22 report.

Domestic U.S. market share of menthol cigarettes is increasing<sup>8</sup>



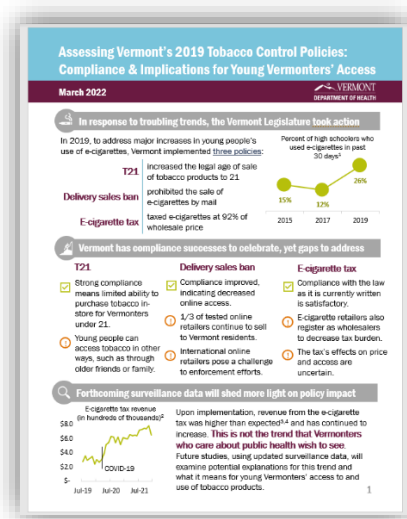
# Assessing Vermont's 2019 tobacco prevention policies

## Compliance & access: Notable successes & gaps to address

In 2019, to address the major increase in young people's use of e-cigarettes, Vermont implemented three policies.

- **Tobacco 21 (T21)** raised the legal age of sale to 21
- **Delivery sales ban** made it illegal to sell e-cigarettes to Vermonters by mail
- **E-cigarette tax** put a 92% tax on e-cigarettes

A separate policy brief is available with additional findings about successes and gaps related to compliance and access. Post-policy surveillance data will be available later this year to shed light on the policies' impact on youth and young adult access to and use of tobacco products.



### Delivery sales ban: Compliance has risen, with room to improve

In 2021, 63% of tested online retailers were in compliance, compared to only 38% in 2020. The Vermont Attorney General's legal action against non-compliant online retailers brought in **\$618,000 in penalties** to the state and improved compliance.<sup>22</sup>

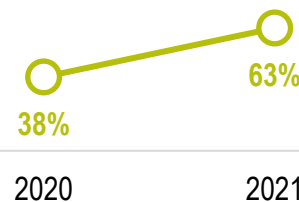


Compliance improved, indicating decreased online access.



1/3 of tested online retailers continue to sell to Vermont residents.

#### Annual compliance rate<sup>21</sup>



### E-cigarette tax: Compliance is satisfactory, but effectiveness uncertain

**Most wholesaler non-compliance is unintentional** due to errors like categorizing products incorrectly.<sup>23</sup> Education from the Tax Department has resulted in improvement.

Under current policy, a single entity can be licensed as both a wholesaler and retailer. **This business structure allows these companies to lessen their tax** by selling the products to themselves at lower rates. This is a common occurrence and could be limiting the tax's effectiveness.



Compliance with the law as it is currently written is satisfactory.



E-cigarette retailers also register as wholesalers to decrease tax burden.



The tax's effects on price and access are uncertain.

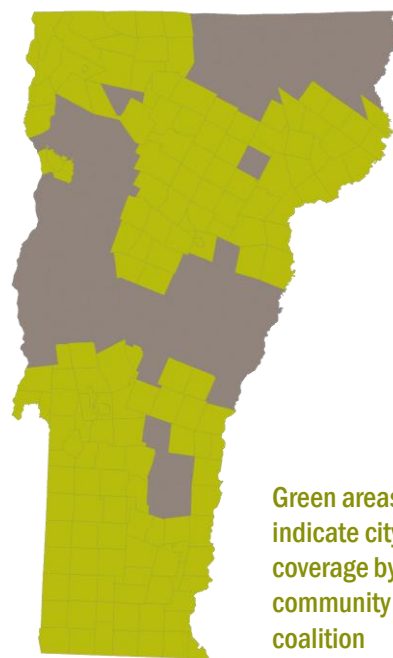
# Community efforts ensure tobacco prevention & control work is locally relevant

The number of coalitions doing evidence-based tobacco control is declining

66%

of Vermonters across most of its cities and towns were **able to be covered by tobacco community coalitions** in FY21 despite a reduction in the number of funded community coalitions. Additional reductions in the number of community coalitions may occur in the future due to decreased funding, impacting coverage and the capacity of local efforts.<sup>24, 25</sup>

Community coalition service coverage, FY21<sup>24</sup>



“Tobacco is one of the only retail products whose long-term use almost invariably leads to addiction and severe health problems.”<sup>26</sup>

-Local Vermont Leader



## Local efforts are vital to tobacco control and prevention work

In FY21 **local coalition grantees impacted tobacco control** efforts with work<sup>27</sup> that:

- ✓ **Promoted** youth and adult **cessation**
- ✓ **Partnered with** individuals and **community** organizations to strengthen prevention efforts
- ✓ **Educated constituents** on harms of tobacco and nicotine-containing products
- ✓ **Mobilized youth** through anti-tobacco programming
- ✓ **Engaged media** outlets for earned media opportunities
- ✓ **Expanded** local smoke-free **policies**

**Local and grassroots activities** are part of the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention's **Best Practices** for Comprehensive Tobacco Control & Prevention programs<sup>28</sup>

To **contact your local tobacco coalition**, go here:

<https://www.healthvermont.gov/wellness/tobacco/state-and-community-partners>

# Tobacco use is a critical issue in VT

There is high agreement among local leaders



## Local efforts are vital to tobacco control and prevention work

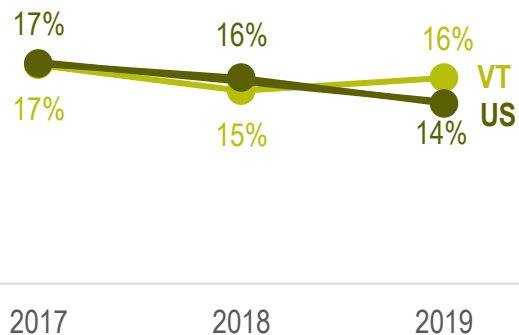
**Tobacco use remains a critical issue** in the state. In 2021 the Local Opinion Leaders Survey was administered as a joint effort by the TCP, the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programs (ADAP) and the TCP's external evaluator, PDA. This survey built on two previous studies from 2014 and 2017.

**77%** of local leaders surveyed said that tobacco is equally as important or among the most important health problems<sup>26</sup>

Surveillance data **confirms that tobacco use is still a problem.**

**16%** of adult Vermonters smoke, and some populations smoke at double this rate<sup>29</sup>

Rates of adult smoking in Vermont<sup>29</sup> are now higher than the national rate<sup>30</sup>



## Support for potential policies provide possible future directions

**65%** of local leaders surveyed were somewhat or strongly in support of a policy to **prevent retailers from accepting coupons** that reduce the price of cigarettes and other tobacco products<sup>26</sup>

**63%** of local leaders surveyed were somewhat or strongly in support of a policy to **increase the tobacco excise tax**<sup>26</sup>



*If we want people to stop smoking, we need to give them an incentive to quit. Hitting people in their pocketbooks might be an effective solution.*

-Local Leader



A separate report is available with detailed findings about the results from the Local Opinion Leaders Survey Report. The level of support for a variety of tobacco, alcohol, and opioid prevention policies are detailed in this report.

# Looking ahead: priorities & opportunities

## Partners offer perspectives about future directions in tobacco control

Professional Data Analysts, the external evaluator for TCP, conducted **29 interviews** in 2021 with a variety of tobacco control partners. These interviews are being used to inform the **strategic directions** that partners want to prioritize for tobacco control in the state. Findings from interviews will inform the 2020-2025 **Tobacco Control State Plan**.

### Resource limitations elevate the need for collaboration & coordination

Partners are concerned about **limited and decreasing funding for tobacco control**, especially with increasing trends in tobacco use.

Many partners spoke about the need to **collaborate and coordinate efforts**. The coordination between state agencies streamlines work for partners receiving funding from multiple agencies.

*“Everyone splits their resources in a small area, and resources run out very quickly. It’s important that programs at the state level talk to each other.”*

- TCP stakeholder

### It is critical to prioritize health equity in tobacco control efforts

Nearly all partners mentioned the **critical importance of equity** in tobacco control work. Some offered up concrete ideas to operationalize and advance equity.

- **Engage diverse communities** in addressing equity, centering voices in the community.
- Focus on **getting equity written into policy**, such as encouraging equity teams for towns or providing equity training.
- Develop **tailored programming** for sexual and gender minorities and BIPOC communities.

*“It takes more money to reach a specific population and do that work well. We’ve learned that when you let the natural leaders of the community lead and do the work, you get that trust and buy-in.”*

- TCP stakeholder

Are you interested in **providing input** that will inform the Tobacco Control State Plan? Click here to access a short survey to share your thoughts:  
[my.evalsurvey.com/VermontTobaccoPlan](https://my.evalsurvey.com/VermontTobaccoPlan)





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Learn more at <https://www.healthvermont.gov/wellness/tobacco>

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