What, Where and How Tobacco and Nicotine Products are Sold in Vermont

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The goal of this report is to use a variety of data sources to assess the tobacco and nicotine retail environment, how it impacts people in Vermont and the need for consumer protection.

Nicotine is harmful and widely available in Vermont.

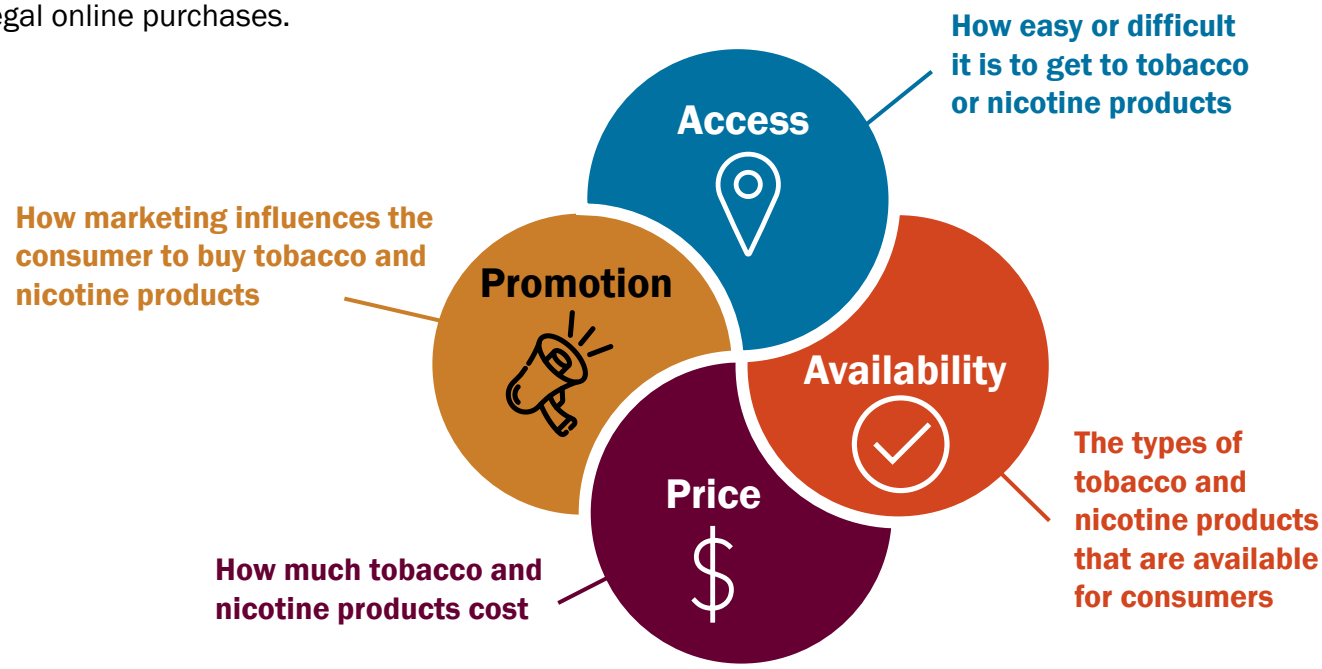
Nicotine has negative health impacts and makes quitting tobacco products difficult, even for people who want to stop. In Vermont, one in six adults use tobacco and nicotine products, and half of those who use cigarettes say they have tried quitting in the past year.[1] People in Vermont can buy tobacco and nicotine products from gas stations, grocery stores, pharmacies, vape shops and cannabis stores with a tobacco license or vape endorsement.

The graphic below shows the different components that make up the tobacco and nicotine retail environment. The retail environment also refers to online marketing and illegal sales of tobacco and nicotine products to Vermont residents, which includes those to minors and to Vermont residents from illegal online purchases.

Characteristics of the retail environment play a crucial role in the individual's decision to start and continue using tobacco.

Product offerings from tobacco and vape companies are rapidly changing and increasing in number, making it more difficult to track product trends including nicotine concentration. States and municipalities use retail strategies to help protect their residents from harmful industry tactics.

This report explains how access, availability, price and promotion of tobacco and nicotine products impact people in Vermont and their tobacco use.



How access impacts people in Vermont

For every one Hannaford in Vermont, there are about 42 tobacco retailers.[2]

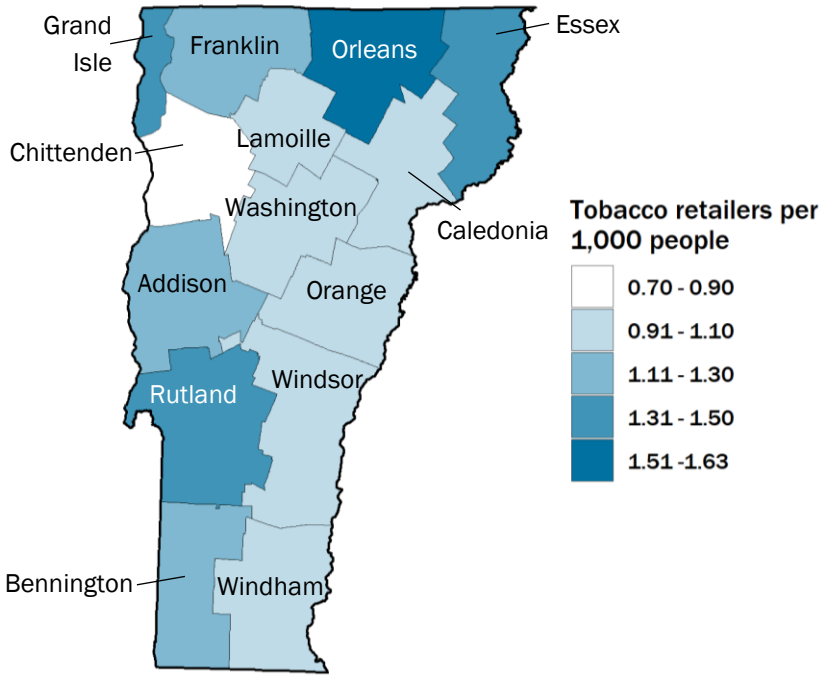
"What scares me is that there are people out there making millions of dollars and selling things that [they] know can seriously harm people, but they still choose to make it readily accessible."

— Vermont resident talking about the tobacco and vape industry[6]

It is easier for people to get tobacco and nicotine products in areas where there are more tobacco retailers. In Vermont, there are 1.1 tobacco retailers per 1,000 people, similar to the national average of 1.2.[3] However, there is wide variety across the state, with retailer density ranging from 0.7 retailers per 1,000 people in Chittenden County, which has the lowest smoking prevalence in the state, to 1.6 in Orleans County. Additionally, areas with higher poverty in Vermont have more tobacco retailers.[4]

Access also impacts people's ability to quit using tobacco. Research has shown that having more tobacco retailers near your home makes it harder to quit smoking.[5]

Vermont tobacco retailer density, 2024[4]



In other jurisdictions, like New York City, **regulations capping the number of tobacco retail licenses successfully reduced the density of retailers after implementation**, including in areas with more low-income residents.[7] Currently, Vermont does not have any state restrictions on retailer density or location.

How availability impacts people in Vermont

One in three tobacco and nicotine products sold in Vermont is flavored.[8]

"It would be great to support people in getting off of the nicotine pouches that are sold in stores. Those are highly addictive and probably super bad for oral health."

— Vermont resident participating in 802Quits treatment services

Use of flavored products is highly prevalent in Vermont, especially among youth and young adults. Among young adults who used tobacco or nicotine in the past 30 days, 80% used flavored products.[9] Out of 711 tobacco retailers, 497 sold nicotine pouches (70%). Among retailers that sold tobacco during the time of the 2024 audit, nearly all sold flavored tobacco products (687 out of 711, 97%).[4]

Nationally, flavors motivate young people to try tobacco and nicotine products, especially minty and fruity flavors.[10] The overwhelming majority (91%) of Vermont high school students who currently use e-cigarettes report that they have used a flavored product in the past 30 days. Additionally, high school students who tried flavored tobacco before age 13 were significantly more likely to currently use e-cigarettes and cigarettes.[1] While e-cigarettes are the most used tobacco product among young people, cigarettes, little cigars and nicotine pouches - an emerging product – are also used.[11] Between 2023 and 2025, nicotine pouch sales increased by 250%, with minty flavors being the most popular among users.[12]

A nicotine pouch display at a store in Vermont highlights the wide variety of flavors sold.

People in Vermont cannot legally buy any tobacco and nicotine products online, making these products less available when enforcement is sufficient. Although illegal online sales still occur, there is state agency collaboration to monitor and stop these sales in Vermont. Flavored products are, however, widely available in stores for people to purchase. E-cigarette use among youth declined in one state after it implemented a ban on flavored tobacco products.[13] Other evidence shows that young adults buy fewer flavored tobacco products after flavors are banned,[14] and evidence from Massachusetts shows a 1.4% decrease in the statewide adult cigarette smoking prevalence after menthol cigarettes were banned.[15]

How price impacts people in Vermont

Cheaper products make tobacco more accessible to youth and other vulnerable groups.

"A tin of, chew is, like, $10. So, I was buying two of them a day. That's $20 a day."

— Vermont resident participating in 802Quits treatment services

Cigarettes with price promotions at a Vermont store.

Spending on tobacco worsens economic strain on households, as tobacco spending significantly reduces expenditures on essential needs such as health, education, housing and clothing.[16]

Using price strategies, promotions and direct mail/email coupons are strategies the tobacco and vape industry uses to reduce price for consumers. In Vermont, among adults who used tobacco in the past year, 27% used coupons or other special promotions when purchasing tobacco products; among them, most received their coupons in the mail or from the store where they purchased tobacco.[17]

In 2024, of the 711 retailers that were licensed to sell tobacco products at the time of the retail audit, there were 239 retailers (34%) that had at least one price promotion during the time of the audit.[4]

Receiving coupons encourages people to start using and continue to use tobacco and nicotine products.[18] Additionally, the tobacco and vape industry targets individuals with lower education and those closer to the poverty line to send coupons for tobacco products, regardless of their tobacco use status.[19]

While Vermont has one of the highest tobacco product excise taxes in the US, it does permit tobacco direct mail/email coupons and in-store price promotions. Evidence from other states shows that **policies prohibiting discounts reduce tobacco and e-cigarette use**.[20] In Vermont, two-thirds (66%) of respondents to the Vermonter Poll said they are in favor of a Vermont policy that would prevent tobacco products from being sold below a certain price or with discount promotions.[21]

How promotion impacts people in Vermont

Retailers near schools are more likely to have exterior advertisements and price promotions that attract youth.[4]

"I wish that the media portrayed tobacco differently. Because so much of the targeting to youth is through media, and they use people who young children, kids and teens idolize, and they even pay them just to hold it just for a picture even."

— Vermont young adult[6]

One in five retailers in Vermont are located within 1,000 feet of an elementary, middle or high school. Youth who walk to school and stop at retailers are more likely to use tobacco products.[22] Further, youth who don't use e-cigarettes are vulnerable to marketing like advertisements at convenience stores, which are related to increased curiosity about vaping and susceptibility to begin using e-cigarettes.[23] In Vermont, among students who report using electronic vapor products in the past 30 days, a quarter (25%) use them because they are curious about them, highlighting the need to reduce opportunities for youth exposure to tobacco and nicotine products and marketing.[1]

In a sample of Vermont youth and young adults, **over a third of respondents see ads for e-cigarettes daily or weekly** when they are out and about or online, highlighting high levels of exposure to tobacco and nicotine product marketing. [24]

Colorful e-cigarette products in a Vermont store.

Restricting new licenses near schools has reduced retailer density and the marketing of products to school children.[25, 26] In Vermont, one municipality has adopted a zoning amendment that is expected to reduce access to the nearly 900 youth who attend a nearby high school.[27] Most cities in Vermont do not have restrictions on the number of retailers near schools.

Key Takeaways

The strategies highlighted below are recommended and evidence-based to lower prevalence of tobacco and nicotine use in Vermont:

Access

Regulations that cap the number of tobacco retail licenses or place restrictions on the locations of licenses can reduce the number of retailers and reduce access to tobacco and nicotine products.

Availability

Limiting access to flavored tobacco and nicotine products through a comprehensive restriction of flavored products is recognized as an effective policy intervention and public health approach to address tobacco-associated health disparities and reduce youth and adult tobacco and nicotine use.

Price

Increasing excise taxes, prohibiting tobacco and nicotine coupons and promotions and establishing a minimum floor price are national best practices to reduce tobacco and nicotine use.

Promotion

Restricting new licenses near schools and restricting the promotion of tobacco products at the point-of-sale would benefit public health by reducing retailer density and the marketing of products to youth.

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