



Law and Policy Partnership to End the Commercial Tobacco Epidemic

COMMERCIAL TOBACCO IN CALIFORNIA

Endgame Policies

California has been a leader in commercial tobacco control by implementing strong measures to reduce tobacco product sales and consumption. The state recently banned most flavored tobacco products, which is an important step in preventing youth initiation of tobacco use and reducing tobacco-related health disparities.

However, more can be done to create a commercial tobacco-free environment. Although the tobacco industry has tried to <u>push back</u> against these measures, Tribes, states, and local governments have the authority to further regulate and even prohibit tobacco product sales. This can be achieved by building a movement that prepares communities, especially those that







have been disproportionately targeted by the tobacco industry, to end the commercial tobacco epidemic and reduce tobacco-related health disparities.

Endgame Policies

The tobacco industry has no reason to stop selling addictive products and cannot be relied upon for solutions to the public health problem it has created. The goal of public health is to end all commercial tobacco use, and endgame strategies are necessary to achieve this goal. While several definitions of endgame exist, the Partnership defines endgame policies as initiatives designed to change the structural, political, and social dynamics that sustain the commercial tobacco epidemic in order to permanently end it.² Other policies often labeled as "endgame" are what the Partnership would more readily describe as "endgame-focused policies." Such policies are designed to greatly reduce the availability of tobacco products in a community but either do not comprehensively prohibit all commercial tobacco and nicotine products or do not address all retailers or reductions, and thus the public health benefits are more long-term by nature. Endgame-focused policies definitely move a community toward the endgame but should not be considered the final destination.

Until recently, most endgame strategies have been pursued internationally. For example, Bhutan banned all tobacco product sales in 2004, although commercial tobacco use remains high.³ The United Kingdom is moving toward a "smoke-free generation" policy that would prohibit sales of combustible tobacco products to anyone born after January 1, 2009.⁴ Other countries and non-U.S. cities have considered partial or total restrictions on tobacco product sales. Predictably, the tobacco industry is vigorously fighting any sales restrictions. For instance, New Zealand gained international recognition for passing a smoke-free generation policy, along with a plan to reduce tobacco retailers by 90 percent,⁵ but repealed this law in early 2024 before it took effect.⁶ Nevertheless, research suggests that endgame policies enjoy broad public support.⁷

Two U.S. localities that have led in ending the sale of most tobacco products are the California cities of Manhattan Beach and Beverly Hills. Manhattan Beach prohibited the sale of all tobacco products after Jan 1, 2021; Beverly Hills prohibited the sale of most tobacco products, also after Jan 1, 2021, exempting existing cigar lounges and providing for temporary hardship exemptions. In addition, other localities in California are exploring similar bold initiatives to end the commercial tobacco epidemic.

Below are possible endgame and intermediate policy approaches that California localities could consider. This publication outlines some of the benefits and challenges of such policies and provides important elements to consider when a community plans to pursue any particular





policy. Each community, however, should evaluate specific policies based on its own specific needs. While no policy is without litigation risk, legal authority exists to enact such policies. Access to commercial tobacco products is not a right, and both the state and localities within California have the power to regulate and prohibit tobacco sales. Finally, for any and all tobacco control policies, best practices should include free, accessible, and culturally appropriate commercial tobacco treatment support to ensure that while we work to prevent new tobacco product use, we also help those who use tobacco products quit.

End the Sale of All Tobacco Products

California and localities within the state have the legal authority to directly end the legal sale of commercial tobacco products, as Manhattan Beach and Beverly Hills have essentially done. Compliance in those jurisdictions has been high, in part because of each city's educational outreach to retailers and the community, as well as robust enforcement planning.¹⁰

Benefits

- Immediate end of the legal sale of commercial tobacco products.
- Public health gains are immediate: prohibiting the sale of commercial tobacco products would significantly reduce, if not functionally eliminate, access to commercial tobacco products for most potential new consumers, as well as current consumers.
- Economic gains including reduced health care costs and increased worker productivity as a result of fewer people using commercial tobacco products.
- Retailer enforcement would be relatively straightforward.
- Would likely result in a marked decrease in pollution, such as cigarette butts and tobacco product waste in the community.
- Most people who use tobacco products, especially those that use cigarettes, want to quit, so combining this policy with free, evidence-based, and culturally appropriate cessation services could motivate many current consumers to quit.

Challenges

• Likely to be socially contentious. Common — yet inaccurate¹¹ — analogies to alcohol prohibition in the 1920s are often drawn. Effective endgame policies focus on the sales, not the use or possession, of commercial tobacco products.





- Economic concerns of retailers and others in the tobacco product supply line may present political obstacles at local and state levels, resulting in uncertain political willingness to endorse abolition.
- Depending on neighboring communities or states, people could purchase tobacco products elsewhere and undermine public health aims. For more on illicit markets, see the Partnership's publication *Endgame Policies: Debunking the Industry's Illicit Trade Arguments*.
- Decrease in tobacco tax revenue would require readjustment and alternative mechanisms for programs (e.g., tobacco control programs) funded in whole or part by tobacco product taxes and tobacco sales-related fees. However, the economic and health benefits far outweigh the decrease in tax revenue.

Important to Consider

- Comprehensive policies provide the greatest health benefits and are the most likely to withstand any legal challenges. Any exceptions should be narrow, ideally short-term, and developed in a way that would not exacerbate health inequities.
- Policies should focus on the sale of tobacco products. Regulating the purchase, use, and possession of commercial tobacco products should not be a component of endgame policies.
- Adoption of a policy should include targeted funds to continue enforcement.
- Providing business counseling services to existing retailers to develop alternative opportunities may mitigate some economic-related concerns.
- Endgame policies should include free commercial tobacco treatment support.

Nicotine-Free Generation/Birthdate-Based Sales Restrictions

Nicotine-Free Generation or Birthdate-Based Sales Restriction policies ("NFG"), also referred to as "tobacco-free generation" policies, ¹² are another strategy gaining some momentum in the United States and globally. ¹³ The policy phases out, year-by-year, the lawful sale of commercial tobacco products. The first generational ban in the world — in Balanga City, Philippines — struck down by the courts; however, the second — in Brookline, Massachusetts — survived a legal challenge, and has led to similar policies being passed in Massachusetts.







Benefits

- Relatively low costs for implementation, given existing age-verification requirements; compliance is not likely to be any more challenging over the long term than it is presently.
- Potential political appeal. Because the phase-out occurs over time, current tobacco product consumers and the tobacco industry (manufacturers, wholesalers, distributors, and retailers) are not immediately impacted by this policy.
- Nicotine-free generation policies offer minimal economic disruption in exchange for universally-agreed-to principles that youth and young persons should not use commercial tobacco products and that any commercial tobacco product use is harmful regardless of age or nature of use.
- Potential social appeal. Youth and young people are generally not supportive of commercial tobacco product use, which is key to sustaining the phase-out over the long term.¹⁴





Challenges

- Most benefits will accrue over the long term because it will take decades for full implementation of the policy.¹⁵
- Establishing a start date around a particular birth-year and those born thereafter may be perceived as ceding all older persons to tobacco-related health harms and continuing to allow for tobacco-related health disparities.¹⁶
- Adoption of a nicotine-free generation policy could diminish momentum for enacting shorter-term, evidence-based tobacco control measures.
- Resources invested in developing and implementing a nicotine-free generation policy could detract from resources available for more effective policies.
- Long term commitment presents risks for sustained legal challenges amid potentially changing legal and political environments.¹⁷
- Age-verification procedures will require consistent compliance checks and training.

Important to Consider

- Age-verification should be required for every sale, regardless of the perceived age of the purchaser.
- U.S. law allows states to increase the minimum legal sales age for selling tobacco products, as California did when it increased the minimum legal sales age to 21 in 2016. California state law does not preempt local jurisdictions from increasing the minimum legal sales age.
- Brookline, Massachusetts adopted a nicotine-free generation policy that survived a legal challenge at the Massachusetts Supreme Court, and other towns in that state have followed suit. While this does not establish a legal precedent in California, it could provide further legal support for similar policies in California.
- Policies should continue to focus exclusively on the sale of tobacco products. Any penalties
 directed toward the purchase, use, and possession of commercial tobacco products should
 be discontinued as a matter of equitable enforcement.





Retail Sunsetting Policies

Shaping the retail environment to be less conducive to tobacco product sales is a way for local and state authorities to phase out or sunset the availability of commercial tobacco products. This can be done by reducing the number of available licenses in an area, imposing minimum distances between retailers, or — where a comprehensive licensing scheme exists — eliminating the issuance of new licenses and only allowing current license holders to renew their licenses for a finite period. Bloomington, Minnesota, passed an ordinance to eliminate new tobacco retail licenses by limiting tobacco sales to stores that currently hold a license and by not allowing transfers to other business owners.

Benefits

- Some of the legal structure for such policies may already exist. For example, California
 requires a license to sell tobacco products in the state, and over 200 local jurisdictions have
 their own tobacco retail license requirements. Licenses are, by definition, privileges and not
 entitlements, so the public entity issuing the license has broad discretion to establish the
 requirements.
- License caps may be adjusted downward to reduce available licenses over time, or current licensees may continue to renew their licenses, but any transfers to other licensees are prohibited. This policy can have positive public health effects when implemented over a short- to medium-term timeline.
- Focusing tobacco control on the sellers, as opposed to consumers, of tobacco products may alleviate some social or political concerns. Phase-out modeling may provide sufficient leadtime for retailers to make suitable arrangements to find more viable options for their business.

Challenges

- Sunsetting retailer licenses is likely to raise political pressures from retailers, some of whom may claim to primarily generate revenue from commercial tobacco product sales.
- The timeline for phasing-out tobacco sales ensures continued access to tobacco products for a certain period, along with the consequences and related health disparities.
- State-wide implementation would require significant administrative resources to manage a phase-out effectively. Implementation in a local jurisdiction could also be resource-heavy depending on which policy is pursued and how many existing retailers exist in a community but would allow for a more tailored approach.





Important to Consider

- For a sunsetting license cap, having a shorter-term end date for all licenses to sunset (for example, 3 years) would make this more of an endgame policy. This would also address the concern that larger corporate tobacco retailers could exist in perpetuity.
- Providing business counseling services to existing retailers may lessen some of the economic-related concerns by identifying and supporting other opportunities.

Pricing

California communities could adopt pricing policies to increase the cost of commercial tobacco products to consumers and, as a result, reduce commercial tobacco use. Local cities and counties could start out with a significant price increase or adopt graduated pricing mechanisms that increase the price of commercial tobacco products over time. Sooner or later, the price of tobacco products would become too high for some consumers to continue paying, which would reduce consumption.

Benefits

- Increasing the price of tobacco products has consistently proven to be effective in reducing tobacco product demand.¹⁸
- Increased prices, when combined with effective, accessible, free, and culturally tailored cessation options, can significantly reduce the demand for commercial tobacco products and encourage current tobacco product consumers to access proven cessation services.¹⁹

A Challenges

• Higher prices on commercial tobacco products can be framed by the tobacco industry as disproportionately burdening communities that have been predatorily targeted by the industry. While this is true for the immediate costs of the products, it does not account for the tremendous economic savings in health care costs and income benefits that accrue to those who stop using commercial tobacco products. Price increases encourage current tobacco product consumers to consider quitting, so ensuring the availability of effective, free, and culturally appropriate cessation services could burden lower-income communities. Nevertheless, making commercial tobacco products unappealing to purchase may significantly reduce the toll of tobacco- related disease on all members of the community, including those with limited finances.²⁰







- Price policies should include restrictions on the use of coupons, discounts, and rebates to ensure the tobacco industry does not undermine the purpose and effectiveness of the policies.
- Timeline for price increases may be susceptible to political pressures. While immediate and high price increases may face more opposition from retailers, they are the most likely to change consumer behavior by discouraging initiation and encouraging cessation in the near term, thus providing the most significant health equity benefits. At the same time, a significant price increase may face its own political or social pushback.
- Online sales, which are hard to regulate at the local level, can undermine the public health aims of the policy.²¹

Important to Consider

 Many localities in California, and throughout the country, have already established minimum prices for tobacco products.







Restricting Sales to Certain Retailers

Tobacco products may be sold only in locations holding a valid state tobacco retailer license in California. In addition, local jurisdictions may require a local tobacco retailer license — and by express authorization, local tobacco retailer licenses may be more stringent than the state's requirements. Though not eliminating tobacco sales, a policy restricting who may hold a tobacco retailer license could reduce both exposure and access to tobacco products. One example of this approach would be to allow tobacco products only to be sold at age-restricted, tobacco-only retailers.

Benefits

Restricting licenses dramatically decreases youth exposure to marketing and advertising of
commercial tobacco products. For example, youth buying candy or snacks at a gas station
would not be exposed to powerwall displays of products behind the counter. In addition, it
seems likely that external advertising would be significantly decreased if certain retailers,
such as convenience stores, were no longer eligible for tobacco retail licenses.





- With appropriate enforcement, this should lead to fewer illegal sales because underage buyers would be prohibited from entering a retail store, resulting in fewer opportunities for underage sales.
- This approach may be more politically viable because commercial tobacco products would still be available to adults.
- This policy approach would significantly reduce the overall number of retailers, which should lead to better enforcement.

▲ Challenges

- Restricting licenses would be most successful if it were combined with a cap on tobacco retail licenses to guard against the proliferation of adult-only, tobacco-only retailers.
- Retail establishments like gas stations and convenience stores may try to "divide" their
 current stores and circumvent the restriction by making an "age-restricted" side and an "all
 ages" side. Such a tactic can be addressed by establishing requirements that licenses can
 only be issued to stand alone retailers.
- Without enacting other policies simultaneously, this will likely concentrate retailers in certain neighborhoods,²² thus increasing the disproportionate burden those communities will continue to bear and potentially exacerbating existing health disparities.

Important to Consider

- When combined with a sunsetting license cap, restricting licenses is a true endgame policy.
- Robust enforcement is crucial to the success of this policy. Such measures should include a requirement that purchasers present valid identification.
- Compliance rates for age-restricted, tobacco-only retailers, compared to all retailers who may sell tobacco products, will be important information to collect. Some youth surveys have indicated that youth commonly obtain tobacco products from vape shops.²³
- Providing business counseling services to existing retailers may diminish some economicrelated concerns.







✓ Prohibit the Sale of Single-Use Tobacco Products

Prohibiting the sale of single-use tobacco products – like disposable vape pens and pods, and filtered cigarettes – would remove from the market some of the most popular and addictive products. In addition, it would prohibit the sale of the most littered products in the world, which are a major cause of environmental harm.²⁴

Benefits

- Would likely result in a marked decrease in tobacco product waste in the community.
- Eliminating the sale of filtered cigarettes and many e-cigarettes, including most disposable e-cigarettes and related products, would remove the two most popular and commonly used tobacco products from the marketplace.
- In the absence of their favorite products, people who use tobacco products may be motivated to quit and seek cessation support.
- Environmental policies tend to resonate with the younger generation, which can be beneficial both for support of the policy and in raising awareness of the problems with tobacco product waste.





Challenges

- This policy would only affect the sale of certain products that meet the criteria; thus, it carries
 the risk of product substitution when people are encouraged by the industry to switch to nonrestricted products (e.g., roll-your-own, cigars, and reusable e-cigarettes).
- Tobacco industry investment into alternative materials, including bioplastics and biodegradable components, might lead to a return of some single-use products in the midto long-term.

Important to Consider

- As with other commercial tobacco policies, the purchase, use, or possession of these
 products should not be punished, even though much of the tobacco waste generated
 comes from individual use and littering.
- The risk for substituting restricted products for non-restricted products in tobacco use behaviors may be somewhat lessened through a robust cessation program.
- While still allowing commercial tobacco products to be sold in retail stores, this could lead to a phase-out of all other tobacco products.

Conclusion

California jurisdictions can choose from an array of policy options that will move them toward the elimination of commercial tobacco use among youth and adults and the reduction of health disparities. This resource highlights several of the more prominent endgame policies that jurisdictions may consider as they discuss a potential future for their localities free from the harms of commercial tobacco and nicotine.

Building momentum for a movement toward the endgame may look different in different jurisdictions, and the Public Health Law Center is here to support our partners throughout the country. Contact us for more information about designing and implementing endgame policies.

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Endnotes

- 1 The Public Health Law Center recognizes that traditional and commercial tobacco are different in the ways they are planted, grown, harvested, and used. Traditional tobacco is and has been used in sacred ways by Indigenous communities and tribes for centuries. In comparison, commercial tobacco is manufactured with chemical additives for recreational use and profit, resulting in disease and death. For more information, visit http://keepitsacred.itcmi.org. When the word "tobacco" is used throughout this digest, a commercial context is implied and intended.
- 2 Adapted from: Ruth Malone et al., *Tobacco Control Endgames: Global Initiatives and Implications for the UK*, Cancer Research UK (2014).
- 3 Mongal Singh Gurung et al., *Current Tobacco Use and Its Associated Factors Among Adults in a Country with Comprehensive Ban on Tobacco: Findings from the Nationally Representative STEPS Survey, Bhutan*, 2014, 14 POPULATION HEALTH METRICS 28 (2016), https://pophealthmetrics.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12963-016-0098-9; WHO Report on the Global Tobacco Epidemic, 2021, Country Profile: Bhutan, WORLD HEALTH ORG. (2021), https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/country-profiles/tobacco/who_rgte_2021_bhutan.pdf?sfvrsn=b6061cc2_5.
- 4 Sylvia Hui, *UK Lawmakers Back Landmark Bill to Gradually Phase Out Smoking for Good*, ASSOCIATED PRESS, April 17, 2024, https://apnews.com/article/britain-smoking-ban-0780fd4fc9afcdc002a0544252ef907a.
- 5 Smokefree Environments and Regulated Products (Smoked Tobacco) Amendment Act 2022 (N.Z.), https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/bills-and-laws/bills-proposed-laws/document/BILL_125245/smokefree-environments-and-regulated-products-smoked-tobacco. New Zealand's measure would have banned the sale of combusted or smoked tobacco products to persons born after Jan 1, 2009, but not the sale of all nicotine products including e-cigarettes.
- 6 Lucy Craymer, *New Zealand Set to Scrap World-first Tobacco Ban*, REUTERS, Feb. 27, 2024, https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/new-zealand-set-scrap-world-first-tobacco-ban-2024-02-27.
- 7 Hana Kim et al, *Public Support for Tobacco Endgame Policies: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis*, NICOTINE TOB. RES. (forthcoming 2024), https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/38890771.
- 8 Press Release, Action on Smoking & Health, Beverly Hills and Manhattan Beach, California Make History for Public Health (Jan. 5, 2020), https://ash.org/california-jan1-2021. The Endgame policies discussed in this document are limited to what the state of California and cities and counties can do under federal law (i.e., they are *not* preempted or likely preempted from enacting these measures). In international literature, other more potentially impactful policies are discussed, including tobacco product standards that require low or zero nicotine levels. Reducing the addictiveness of tobacco products might encourage some people who use tobacco products to quit and discourage others from using tobacco products. See Cheneal Puljevic et al, Closing the Gaps in Tobacco Endgame Evidence: A Scoping Review, 31 TOBACCO CONTROL 365 (2022), https://doi.org/10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2021-056579.
- 9 Joelle Lester and Mark Meaney, *Not for Sale: State Authority to End Cigarette Sales*, 44 MITCHELL HAMLINE LAW REVIEW 68 (2018), https://www.publichealthlawcenter.org/sites/default/files/resources/LesterMeaney_NotForSale.pdf.
- 10 Lisa Henriksen et al, *Evaluations of Compliance with California's First Tobacco Sales Bans and Tobacco Marketing in Restricted and Cross-Border Stores*, 26 NICOTINE TOB. RES. 1159 (2024).
- 11 German Lopez, *Prohibition Worked Better Than You Think*, VOX (June 13, 2019), https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/2019/6/5/18518005/prohibition-alcohol-public-health-crime-benefits.





- 12 "Tobacco-free generation," or TFG, is a prevalent term for describing a generational ban on tobacco product sales. However, the term is problematic: sacred use of tobacco among certain Tribal/Native American/First Nation communities has deep cultural and spiritual meaning, and the erasure of such practices in discussion let alone in practice is unjust. Further, "tobacco"-free generation might unduly constrict the endgame strategy to tobacco products that contain tobacco, leaving out other non-tobacco nicotine products. While combustible tobacco product consumption is a definite target for this endgame strategy, noncombustible and non-tobacco nicotine products should also be clearly captured. The Public Health Law Center will use and encourage the use of the term "nicotine-free generation" or NFG, with the understanding that this term does not intend to apply to sacred use of tobacco. For the purposes of this document, when another organization has used "tobacco-free generation" to describe the policy, we will use that term.
- 13 Deborah Khoo et al., *Phasing-out Tobacco: Proposal to Deny Access to Tobacco for Those Born from 2000*, 19 TOBACCO CONTROL 355, 356 (2010), https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2978941/pdf/tobaccocontrol31153.pdf.
- 14 The tobacco industry and its supporters often argue that people have the right to choose to use tobacco products, even if they are harmful. However, this argument ignores the fact that the tobacco industry has manipulated information about the dangers of these products and that nicotine addiction makes it difficult to quit. Moreover, the government has a responsibility to protect public health by regulating harmful activities, even if they are legal for adults.
- 15 Ruth Malone and Tim McAffee, *Birthdate-based Commercial Tobacco Sales Restrictions: Will 'Tobacco-Free Generation' Policies Advance of Delay the Endgame?*, TOBACCO CONTROL (forthcoming 2024), https://doi.org/10.1136/tc-2024-058716.
- 16 Courts have rejected the argument that banning the sale of a product to people born after a certain date violates Equal Protection. These courts, including the one in Massachusetts that supported Brookline's ordinance, have decided that drawing lines is not necessarily unconstitutional. See Public Health Law Center, *The Nicotine-free Generation Approach: Legal Authority for California Communities* (2024), https://www.publichealthlawcenter.org/sites/default/files/resources/CA-Nicotine-Free-Gen-Legal-Authority.pdf.
- 17 See generally Roe v. Wade, 410 U.S. 113 (1973).
- 18 See, e.g., Thuy T. T. Le and Mohammed Jaffri, *The association between smoking behaviors and prices and taxes per cigarette pack in the United States from 2000 through 2019*, 22 BMC PUBLIC HEALTH 856 (2022).
- 19 Andrea Licht et al, How Do Price Minimizing Behaviors Impact Smoking Cessation? Findings from the International Tobacco Control (ITC) Four Country Survey, 8 INT'L J ENVIRON RES PUBLIC HEALTH 1671 (2011).
- 20 Low-income communities do not need a subsidy for tobacco-related health disparities leading to preventable death. Put another way: "[E]asy access to deadly products cannot be regarded as a benefit." Patricia McDaniel et al., *The Tobacco Endgame: A Qualitative Review and Synthesis* 25 TOBACCO CONTROL 594-604 (2016), https://tobaccocontrol.bmj.com/content/25/5/594.
- 21 California has recently adopted state-level amendments to its tobacco control laws which, while allowing for delivery sales from online or other remote transactions, require delivery sellers to comply with any local ordinances as if the sale occurred entirely within that jurisdiction. While this does not make local enforcement any easier, it does establish a state-wide rule and expectation. See Public Health Law Center, AB 3218 and SB 1230: The Next Step in California's Flavor Law (Sept. 30, 2024), https://www.publichealthlawcenter.org/commentary/240930/9/30/24-ab-3218-and-sb-1230-next-step-californias-flavor-law.
- 22 Vidya Purushothaman et al., *Longitudinal Analysis of Tobacco and Vape Retail Density in California*, 20 TOBACCO INDUCED DISEASES 87 (2022), https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9574848.
- 23 Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, *Where Do Youth Get Their E-cigarettes?* (2024), https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/assets/factsheets/0403.pdf; see also Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. Where Do Youth Smokers Get Their Cigarettes? (2023), https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/assets/factsheets/0073.pdf.
- 24 Public Health Law Center, *Tobacco Product Waste: Frequently Asked Questions* (2020), https://www.publichealthlawcenter. org/sites/default/files/resources/Tobacco-Product-Waste-CA-FAQ.pdf.