

Tobacco-Free Pharmacy Legislative Policies

Frequently Asked Questions

Why are tobacco-free pharmacy policies necessary?

According to the CDC, tobacco-related disease claims 480,000 lives every single year in the US. Did you know that the United States is virtually the only country in the world where tobacco products are sold in a business that is licensed as a pharmacy? A local legislative policy, as has been passed in San Francisco, Boston and number of other cities will reduce the number of tobacco outlets, improve health equity across the whole jurisdiction and enable pharmacists to dispense medications in the back of the store without addictive and deadly tobacco being sold at the front of the store.

What kind of support is there?

Pharmacists, pharmacy schools such as UCSF and Touro University, the State of California Board of Pharmacy, American Heart Association, American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, American Lung Association, Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights, Breathe California, California Association of Retired Americans, California Dental Hygienists Association and Youth Leadership Institute are among the early leaders that have pledged support for local tobacco-free pharmacy policies. Forty seven (47) California communities have passed a legislative policy that eliminates tobacco retailer licenses for pharmacies: San Francisco, Richmond, Unincorporated Santa Clara, Unincorporated Marin, Berkeley, Healdsburg, Hollister, Daly City, Unincorporated Sonoma, Novato, Los Gatos, Unincorporated Contra Costa, Palo Alto, Fairfax, Cloverdale, Unincorporated San Mateo, Tiburon, Portola Valley, Saratoga, Half Moon Bay, Alameda, Corte Madera, Larkspur, San Carlos, San Anselmo, Hermosa Beach, Lafayette, San Rafael, Beverly Hills, Unincorporated Los Angeles, South San Francisco, Watsonville, Cupertino, Santa Maria, Benicia, Unincorporated Alameda, Menlo Park, Los Altos, Manhattan Beach, East Palo Alto, Morro Bay, Oakland, Hayward, Guadalupe, Sebastopol, San Mateo and Mill Valley. New York City joined the list in 2017 along with the entire state of Massachusetts in 2019.

Will a local tobacco-free pharmacy policy actually do anything to help reduce smoking?

More study is needed, but CVS Health published a paper looking at the amount of tobacco being purchased in San Francisco and Boston, communities that no longer provide a tobacco retail license to any pharmacy, be they independent pharmacies, chain drugstores, or big box or grocery stores with pharmacies. The study showed the enactment of policies to eliminate the sale of tobacco products at retailers with pharmacies in San Francisco and Boston was associated with up to a 13.3 percent reduction in purchases of tobacco products. The study can be read here:

http://www.cvshealth.com/sites/default/files/TobaccoPolicyResearchLetter_Final.pdf

Will this hurt small business?

Very few independent pharmacies exist anymore, and of those that exist, virtually all are tobacco-free. Even the big chain pharmacies don't seem to have been hurt by not being able to sell tobacco. Even after San Francisco stopped issuing tobacco retailer licenses to pharmacies in 2008, within the year, Walgreens opened a half-dozen more locations in the city, all required to be tobacco-free.

Why not stop the sale of other unhealthy products like soda, alcohol and candy?

Although there may be support for restricting the sale of soda, alcohol and candy in licensed pharmacies, decades of science point to tobacco as the one product when used as directed, kills. Cigarettes are not a food or a medication and as such have no nutritional or medicinal value. They are addictive and deadly and according to the CDC, are associated with over two dozen illnesses.

Some companies have already acted voluntarily. Why is a law necessary?

While it's wonderful that independent pharmacies and chains like CVS and Target have corporate policies to not sell tobacco, it's also very important to work towards enacting community-wide laws. A law creates parity by applying equally to all stores with pharmacies, and laws are also sustainable and legally enforceable, while a corporate policy could be revoked at will.

Would a law like this be difficult to enforce?

Fines for non-compliance and enforcement agencies vary by city and county. But in the communities where tobacco-free policies have been enacted, stores that have been notified by their local health departments have generally complied immediately. For example, when San Francisco pharmacies were no longer eligible for a local tobacco retailer license past Oct 1, 2008, the many pharmacies that had been selling tobacco (ie Walgreens, Safeway, Costco) immediately removed all tobacco products from their shelves.

What other resources are available on tobacco-free pharmacies?

<http://countertobacco.org/tobacco-free-pharmacies>

<https://no-smoke.org/tobacco-free-pharmacies/>

<http://changelabsolutions.org/publications/tobacco-free-pharmacies>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tobacco-Free_Pharmacies

<http://www.lgbtpartnership.org/pharmacy.html>

Revised October 15, 2020

Bob Gordon

bob@lgbtpartnership.org 415-436-9182