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Commercial Tobacco's Impact: Costly for California's Rural Communities

Rural smokers tend to smoke at higher rates than their urban counterparts, even in California where overall smoking rates are low, and are also twice as likely to use commercial chewing tobacco.¹ It's time to eliminate the unfair health burden commercial tobacco places on rural communities.

Commercial tobacco impacts the health of our rural communities by specifically targeting them.

- Rural adults' use of any commercial tobacco product is significantly higher (25.6%) than the California general population (14.6%).²
- Rural communities have a higher rate of first-time cigarette and smokeless tobacco use than in urban areas and intergenerational tobacco use is a significant factor in prevention efforts.³
- Rural youth and young adults are targeted using images of masculinity, rebellion, and outdoor themes in advertising, which were present in 40% of ads across all products, including in 78% of ads promoting e-cigarettes and heated tobacco products.⁴
- Rural-county stores were more than twice as likely as other stores to sell roll-your-own commercial tobacco and two times more likely to sell commercial chewing tobacco than stores in nonrural counties.⁵
- In rural areas, there is a greater density of tobacco stores with 93 stores selling commercial tobacco per 100,000 residents in rural areas versus 77 stores for 100,000 residents across California.^{2,6}
- Rural-county stores were found to be significantly more likely to advertise at least one discount for commercial chewing tobacco and vaping products which appeals to price-sensitive consumers, including youth (20.9% prevalence of discounts in rural communities vs. 16.8% in nonrural communities).⁴

Commercial tobacco litter negatively impacts the environment of rural communities.

- Cigarette butts are the number one most littered item in the world.⁷
- Cigarette butts leach toxic chemicals into the environment including lead, arsenic, and nicotine – the same toxic chemicals found in secondhand smoke.⁵
- Cigarette filters are made of the plastic material cellulose acetate, which does not biodegrade.⁸
- Butts, cigar tips, chew containers, vape pods and other product packaging are most often disposed of improperly in the form of millions of kilograms of product waste discarded into the environment each year.⁶

Emerging oral nicotine products are becoming dangerously normalized in rural communities.

- While the rate of smoking among Americans has declined from 20.9% of adults in 2005 to 14% of adults in 2017, smokeless tobacco use among rural adults has increased and remains higher in rural populations than in non-rural populations.⁹
- Many smokeless tobacco users see smokeless tobacco use as an alternative to cigarette smoking because they incorrectly believe there is a reduction in risk of related diseases.¹⁰

Comprehensive tobacco-free policies can save lives and improve rural communities.

For additional information on how tobacco and nicotine products impact rural communities, contact RISE at www.ca-rise.org.

- In a survey of rural and small-town Californians, over 88% felt that secondhand smoke was harmful and 68% were in favor of policies prohibiting smoking at outdoor events such as rodeos and fairs. Local smoke free outdoor air laws can protect rural Californians from the secondhand smoke they want to avoid.¹¹
- Securing tobacco control funds may help increase cessation service access and strengthen health infrastructure in rural areas.⁹
- Smart commercial tobacco policies can empower families and community leaders to reject the culture of commercial tobacco use and choose healthier, commercial tobacco-free futures.¹¹
- Stronger regulations on tobacco sampling and coupons can prevent the tobacco industry from having a presence at family- friendly events such as rodeos and fairs. Currently, tobacco promotions are much more common at events in rural communities compared with events in urban communities.
- Local retail licensing policies can reduce youth access to commercial tobacco and help rural communities enforce minimum age purchase laws.¹¹
- The Statewide Rural Coordinating Center’s Policy Platform can serve as a guide for how to approach policy efforts in rural communities with detailed examples highlighting how tobacco control and health promotion align with rural values.¹²
- Policies that decrease cigarette sales do not adversely impact convenience stores. Research shows that convenience stores that adapt to new rules, like banning flavored tobacco, are doing well even with the decline in tobacco sales. Rural convenience stores may increase profit margins and revenue without cigarettes and flavored tobacco.¹³

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