

Executive Summary

The American Lung Association's State of Tobacco Control (SOTC) 2024 national report tracks progress on key tobacco control policies at the state and federal levels as of January 1, 2024. The California version of that report, the State of Tobacco Control 2024 – California Local Grades, is completed in coordination with the national report, similarly assigning grades, but on the local level to California communities instead of the national level.

California continues to be a leader in combating the tobacco industry and protecting its youth from accessing tobacco in 2024. Annually, hundreds of millions of dollars are invested to better the lives of Californians by funding robust tobacco control and prevention programs, including local policy efforts in communities.

To highlight these efforts, in coordination with the national report, the American Lung Association in California releases its State of Tobacco Control 2024– California Local Grades report to track how well California municipalities protect their citizens from the burden of tobacco. The State of Tobacco Control 2024 – California Local Grades report is based on a review of county and municipal codes in four key areas for all 58 counties (which covers the unincorporated areas of each county) and 482 incorporated cities and towns in the state.

The California report assigns grades to every county and city in five key areas: smokefree outdoor air, smokefree housing, reducing tobacco sales, flavored tobacco restrictions, and an overall tobacco control grade, which is calculated based on the grades the city or county receives in specific areas. Each of these critical areas of tobacco control reflects the life-saving measures that local jurisdictions are passing.

This year, the California report is updated to reflect the most relevant policy changes taking place – the grading methodology now includes a new emerging bonus point opportunity, which applies to communities that add a definition of cannabis smoke or cannabis combustible product that includes electronic devices in their secondhand smoke laws. This grants an opportunity to raise their overall tobacco control grade. The passage of Assembly Bill 935, introduced by Assembly member Damon Connolly, aligns state enforcement of California's flavored tobacco law with existing state law that prevents youth access to tobacco products.

In 2023, California continued its progress and nationwide leadership on tobacco control. Senate Bill 626, introduced by Senator Susan Rubio, eliminates the existing exemption in state law that permitted hotels and motels to allow smoking in up to 20% of guestroom accommodations, making it illegal to smoke in hotels and motels. All hotel and motel guestrooms and transient lodging establishments are now 100% smokefree.

With the veto of Assembly Bill 374, introduced by Assembly member Mathew Haney, California worker protections from secondhand smoke remained intact. If signed into law, the bill would have allowed cannabis consumption lounges to sell non-cannabis infused food and host live entertainment, thereby exposing workers to secondhand smoke.

Tobacco continues to be the leading cause of preventable death in the state. Each year, approximately 40,000 adults die in California from smoking, and over one-quarter of all cancer related deaths in the state are attributed to smoking. The tobacco industry continues to find new methods to market and sell its products to a new generation of smokers. For example, to attempt to get around the state flavored tobacco product law, several tobacco companies are now selling products that attempt to replicate menthol's cooling sensation, but that do not contain menthol. These non-menthol tobacco products have similar packaging and marketing strategies as their menthol counterparts.

However, jurisdictions in California continued to move forward by adopting local tobacco control laws. In 2024, cities large and small across California are taking strong stances to protect their youth and residents from the harms of tobacco.

Localities across the state continued their efforts to pass comprehensive flavored tobacco laws, in some cases stronger than state law, by adding the policies to their tobacco retail license provisions. In Mendocino County, the cities of Willits, Ukiah, Fort Bragg, and unincorporated Mendocino County have adopted strong tobacco retail license ordinances, which include comprehensive local flavored tobacco ordinances. Kern County added the city of Bakersfield to the countywide tobacco retail license ordinance, protecting youth from access to tobacco products. Localities such as Marin County, Monterey County, Sonoma County, and the city of Stockton passed comprehensive tobacco policies, paving the way for other jurisdictions to follow suit and protect their residents from the dangers of tobacco.

The State of Tobacco Control 2024 – California Local Grades report aims to increase public knowledge about local laws that protect residents from the deadly toll of tobacco and encourage local leadership to take action where improvement is needed. Grades are not intended to reflect the efforts of local tobacco control coalitions, the broader public health community, or organizations working to advance local tobacco control policies. Instead, responsibility for enacting these life- and revenue-saving policies falls to elected officials in each community. Leadership on key issues and solutions to these complex problems can come from every level of government. Local elected officials can and should continue to take steps to protect residents from tobacco and secondhand smoke.