

Executive Summary

The American Lung Association's State of Tobacco Control (SOTC) 2021 national report tracks progress on key tobacco control policies at the state and federal levels as of January 2, 2021. The California version of that report, the *State of Tobacco Control 2021 – California Local Grades*, is completed in coordination with the national report similarly assigning grades, but on the local level instead of the national level.

2020 has been a year like never before. The COVID-19 pandemic caused hundreds of thousands of deaths and disrupted the lives of everyone in the country. As a public health organization that advocates for the passage of policies that improve the lung health of all Americans, it is imperative to note the multitude of devastating challenges that COVID-19 pandemic has had on the world. While passing stricter tobacco laws to protect the lung health of all individuals is always of utmost importance, lung health has never been more relevant than at a time like this.

The U.S. Surgeon General has conclusively linked smoking to suppression of the immune system, and smoking can cause more severe COVID-19 symptoms, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). With the threat of COVID-19 in addition to the numerous tobacco-caused diseases, it is imperative to prevent youth from starting to use tobacco and to help everyone quit.

Local health departments faced incredible pressure as they responded to the impact of COVID-19. In spite of these challenges, California still proved to be a leader in combating the tobacco industry and protecting its youth from accessing tobacco in 2020. Annually, hundreds of millions of dollars are invested to better the lives of Californians by funding strong tobacco control and prevention programs. California's efforts have not gone unnoticed and are reflected in the report. The California report assigns grades to every local jurisdiction in the state in five key areas: smokefree outdoor air, smokefree housing, reducing tobacco sales, emerging issues (a bonus area for miscellaneous tobacco control policies), and an overall tobacco control grade which is calculated based on the grades they receive in specific areas.

Despite California's significant progress, tobacco continues to be the number one 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. Further, California has about 40,700 high school students that currently smoke and over 6,800 kids begin smoking each year.

While the tobacco industry continues to find new methods to market and sell its products to a new generation of smokers, California continues to be successful in passing local tobacco control laws. To date, 83 municipalities have passed policies restricting the sale of flavored tobacco products. Communities throughout California are taking strong stances to protect their youth and all residents from the harms of tobacco.

To highlight these efforts, in coordination with the national report, the American Lung Association in California releases its State of Tobacco Control 2021 – California Local Grades report to track how well California municipalities protect their citizens from the burden of tobacco. The State of Tobacco Control 2021 – 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 purpose of the *State of Tobacco Control 2021 – California Local Grades* report is to increase public knowledge about local laws that protect residents from the deadly toll of tobacco and to 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 difficult problems can come from every level of government. Local elected officials can, and should, take steps to protect residents from tobacco and secondhand smoke.