

Executive Summary

The American Lung Association's State of Tobacco Control (SOTC) 2022 national report tracks progress on key tobacco control policies at the state and federal levels as of January 1, 2022. The California version of that report, the State of Tobacco Control 2022 – 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.

2021 was an unprecedented year with the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine. 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 continues to have on the world. Passing stricter tobacco laws to protect the lung health of all individuals is always of utmost importance, but as COVID-19 variants continue to emerge, lung health is especially important.

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 numerous tobacco-caused diseases, it is imperative for California jurisdictions to continue passing tobacco control laws. Local health departments continue to face 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 2021. Annually, hundreds of millions of dollars are invested to better the lives of Californians by funding strong tobacco control and prevention programs.

To highlight these efforts, in coordination with the national report, the American Lung Association in California releases its State of Tobacco Control 2022– California Local Grades report to track how well California municipalities protect their citizens from the burden of tobacco. The State of Tobacco Control 2022 – 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 state 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 to tobacco control reflect the life-saving measures that local jurisdictions are passing.

This year, the California report was updated to reflect the most relevant policy changes taking place – the grading methodology now includes a central grade around the sale of flavored tobacco products. Adding the flavored tobacco section to the grading methodology was a reflection of policy changes in California. The passage of Senate Bill 793, introduced by Senator Jerry Hill, got California one step closer to restricting the sale of flavored tobacco. However, a referendum by the tobacco industry not only delayed the implementation of this bill but also made it contingent upon voter approval in the November 2022 general election. Until this is put before the voters, passing policies that end the sale of flavored tobacco on the local level are critical. For this reason, the Flavored Tobacco category was added as a main grading component for the California local grades report.

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, including the referendum on SB 793. However, California continues to be successful in passing local tobacco control laws. In 2021, cities large and small across California are taking strong stances to protect their youth and all residents from the harms of tobacco. The city of Buena Park in Orange County passed a prohibition on the sale of most flavored tobacco products, which was a critical action particularly due to the large tourist attraction for youth, Knotts Berry Farm. San Jose became the largest city in California to prohibit the sale of most flavored tobacco products, paving the way for other jurisdictions to follow suit and protect its residents from the dangers of tobacco.

The purpose of the State of Tobacco Control 2022 – 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.