

# Tobacco Retail Licensing in Lassen County

Final Evaluation Report 2017–2021



Lassen County Public Health Department

Tobacco Use Reduction Program

Christine Johnson, Project Director

1445B Paul Bunyan Rd., Susanville, CA 96130

[www.lassencounty.org](http://www.lassencounty.org)

(P) 530.251.8471 (E) [cjohnson@co.lassen.ca.us](mailto:cjohnson@co.lassen.ca.us)

Report Author: Sue Haun, MA, Evaluation Consultant

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## TOBACCO RETAIL LICENSING IN LASSEN COUNTY FINAL EVALUATION REPORT 2017–2021

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### ABSTRACT

Within rural Lassen County are 33 tobacco retailers, each of which promotes, advertises, and sells tobacco products. In the most recent survey of Lassen County tobacco retail stores in 2013, 69% sold e-cigarettes and other vaping products and 97% of stores sold any of the three flavor varieties (sweet, liquor, or mint) of non-cigarette tobacco. To reduce illegal sales of tobacco products to minors, the Lassen County Tobacco Use Reduction Program (LCTURP) worked to get at least one of the county’s two jurisdictions (the City of Susanville and/or the County of Lassen) to adopt a tobacco retail licensing policy and ban the sale of flavored tobacco products. The objective was not met.

LCTURP conducted outreach, made educational presentations and did “tabling” with a variety of community-based organizations and/or at community events. Staff also conducted key informant interviews (KII) with policymakers, which showed little support for TRL and a public opinion survey that showed 72% support. Paid media in the form of digital, print, and social media boost posts, and a newsletter, were used to good effect. Project staff collaborated with law enforcement to determine the illegal sales rate to youth, which was low, and conducted data collection activities that were part of the statewide Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community campaign. Store observations, KIIs and a public opinion survey documented the prevalence of tobacco products sold as well as policymaker and public support for related policies. All (100%) of stores in Susanville sold flavored tobacco products, as did 88% of the stores in the unincorporated areas of the county. Public support for policies was consistent, with 72% supporting a TRL policy.

Despite making progress early on, project staff endured a staggering amount of personal and professional challenges due to staff vacancies, leaves, the COVID-19 pandemic, and redirection of staff to contact tracing and vaccination clinics, the Beckwourth Complex and Dixie Fires and redirection of staff to evacuation shelters and oxygen centers, as well as power/water outages at work and home, which made it difficult to adequately complete activities or build any kind of momentum with policymakers.

### AIM AND OUTCOME

In order to stop illegal sales of tobacco products to youth and curb the appeal of flavored tobacco products, the Lassen County Tobacco Use Reduction Program (LCTURP) set the following objective:

*By December 31, 2021, at least one jurisdiction in Lassen County (e.g., the City of Susanville or the unincorporated areas) will adopt and implement a tobacco retailer licensing (TRL) policy that prohibits the sale of flavored tobacco products and earmarks a portion of the license fee for enforcement activities. This is a primary objective addressing Communities of Excellence Indicators 3.2.1 and 3.2.9.*

At the end of the 2017–2021 work plan, LCTURP’s objective was not met. To date, neither of the two jurisdictions in Lassen County—the City of Susanville or the unincorporated area—have

adopted and implemented a tobacco retail licensing policy that prohibits the sale of flavored tobacco products.

## BACKGROUND

Lassen County is a rural county located in the high-country region of California. The population is spread over 4,720 miles in one incorporated city (the City of Susanville, the county seat, with a population of 17,947), and an unincorporated area that is home to approximately 17,894 people (US Census, 2010). There are 13 census-designated places in Lassen County and five other unincorporated communities.

According to the US Census (2010), the population is a mix of 66.7% non-Hispanic Whites, 17.5% Hispanics, 2.9% Native Americans, 8.0% African Americans, and 2.1% Asians. About 17.3% of the population is under 18 years of age.

Like many rural areas in California, the adult smoking rate in Lassen County at the time the program started was 20.5%, higher than the state average of 12.7% (California Health Interview Survey, 2012–2014 regional rate). Use rates among minors in predominantly rural areas was 10%, slightly lower than the state rate of 10.5% (California Student Tobacco Survey, 2012). Given that 6,200 minors in Lassen County are potentially at risk, curbing the tobacco use and uptake among this population is a high priority for local tobacco prevention efforts and parents.

The Retail Environment is the tobacco industry’s main point of entry into local communities, and where the bulk of its advertising and promotional budgets are spent (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012). Tobacco retail stores in rural areas tend to have the lowest tobacco prices and the highest amount of tobacco promotions and ads. Tobacco advertising and promotions have an even greater effect on youth than peer pressure, and exposure increases the likelihood that youth will start to smoke.

**Exhibit 1. Lassen County, California**



Within Lassen County are 33 tobacco retailers (California Board of Equalization, 2015), each of which promotes, advertises, and sells tobacco products. In the most recent survey of Lassen County tobacco retail stores, 69% sold e-cigarettes and other vaping products, 93% sold menthol cigarettes, and 97% of the stores sold any of the three flavor varieties (sweet, liquor, or mint) of non-cigarette tobacco (Haun, 2013). Consumption of flavored tobacco products has increased among youth in recent years and they are considered “starter” products that help new users establish daily habits to promote addiction to tobacco products (California Medical Association, 2016). Flavored tobacco products are widely available and their sweet flavors (e.g., birthday cake, cherry, vanilla, etc.) may appeal to youth (Ambrose et al., 2013–2014).

To determine priorities for the 2017–2021 work plan, LCTURP conducted the Communities of Excellence (CX) Needs Assessment in October 2016. Six members of the community, including adult coalition members and partner organizations, took part in the process. Of the 22 indicators assessed, tobacco retail licensing (TRL) and a ban on flavored tobacco products received very low ratings, indicating the need for extensive community and policymaker education. Although, the political environment in rural Lassen County tends to be ultra-conservative, CX participants believed that some officials in the City of Susanville may have a more proactive mindset and be open to regulating the retail environment. Given the need to prevent sales to minors and curb the appeal of flavored tobacco products to youth, LCTURP opted to pursue a TRL policy including a ban on flavored tobacco products for the 2017–2021 funding cycle. This is the first funding cycle during which the project decided to tackle a tobacco retail licensing or a flavored tobacco products objective.

## EVALUATION METHODS AND DESIGN

The evaluation plan provided formative data to inform intervention strategies and activities during the 2017–2021 scope of work, as well as summative data to confirm the adoption and implementation of a legislated policy to license tobacco retailers and prohibit the sale of flavored tobacco products. The study design is non-experimental (there are no control groups) and originally included outcome and process measures.

The outcome—implementation of the policy—would have been measured by comparing a young adult tobacco purchase survey (YATPS) post-policy adoption to pre-policy adoption illegal sales rates. However, due to challenges detailed later in this report, the YATPS was removed from the plan. Alternatively, the implementation of the policy would have been measured by comparing the number of retail licenses that had been issued to a list of known tobacco retailers in the target jurisdiction. However, no policy was adopted and implemented.

Process data were collected through four objective-specific evaluation activities (Exhibit 2). A policy record review was conducted in year one to research the number of tobacco-related policies enacted in each of the two jurisdictions (the City of Susanville and unincorporated areas of the county), when and by whom. Key informant interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of city and county officials in year one to determine support for or opposition to a tobacco retail licensing (TRL) policy. A public opinion survey was conducted in the county in year two with a convenience sample of city and county residents to measure knowledge and attitudes regarding policies regulating the retail environment. The California Student Tobacco Survey (CSTS) was conducted via a contract with UC San Diego in year two to measure statewide and local adolescent rates of tobacco and

marijuana.

In addition to objective-specific evaluation activities, the project also engaged in a number of statewide data collection activities (Exhibit 2). The store observation survey, a round of key informant interviews, a public opinion survey, and the media record were conducted in years two and three as part of the Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community (HSHC) statewide data collection effort coordinated by the California Tobacco Control Program (CTCP) among all Local Lead Agencies in California. These activities were designed to measure the availability of various tobacco products in stores, policymaker, and public opinion on a variety of tobacco policies, including a TRL/flavors ban policy, and the type and amount of media coverage generated. Only results from the HSHC evaluation activities that are relevant to the advancement of the objective are described in detail in this report.

Another round of key informant interviews was required in year four to support LCTURP's End Commercial Tobacco Campaign (ECTC) starting in 2022. However, due to staff turnover and the Beckwourth Complex and Dixie Fires in northeastern California discussed later in this report, these interviews were not completed.

**Training Data Collectors.** Youth and adult volunteers helped LCTURP collect data for the store observation survey and public opinion surveys and the data collectors were trained beforehand. The Tobacco Control Evaluator Center (TCEC) staff trained five adult volunteers in a seven-hour training using the instrument and protocol provided by Stanford University. Participants were quizzed with Kahoot!, a learning game played in a group setting, and completed a post-training assessment. LCTURP trained two adults and six youth (ages 19-21) to prepare for the public opinion surveys in two, two-hour trainings that included a simulation of the actual survey. The simulation was repeated until the responses by the training participants were consistent and there were no additional questions. Project staff personally collected the data for the key informant interviews and media activity record and were trained by TCEC and/or the project's evaluator.

**Data Analysis.** Data analysis used a combination of descriptive, statistical, and content analysis techniques to report on both quantitative and qualitative data. A content analysis was used to analyze the policy record, the media record, and the open-ended questions on the key informant interviews. The public opinion surveys, store observation survey and the closed-ended questions on the interviews were analyzed by calculating frequencies and percentages. The CSTS was analyzed by UC San Diego using descriptive statistics.

**Limitations.** The major limitations of this design are: 1) not having a comparison group to provide another perspective in assessing the intervention's strengths and weaknesses; 2) while all volunteers were trained using the state protocol for the HSHC observations of tobacco retailers and several measures were taken to ensure data collectors understood the materials, there may be inconsistency in the estimated observations of data among volunteers; 3) the convenience sample used for the public opinion surveys may reflect the views of those who chose to participate rather than the entire city/county population; and 4) the small sample sizes used for the public opinion surveys and key informant interviews may reflect the views of those who chose to participate rather than the entire county population or all policymakers.

**Exhibit 2. Key Process Evaluation Activities**

Evaluation Activity	Purpose	Sample	Instrument Source <sup>1</sup>	Analysis Method	Timing /Waves
Policy Record Review	Document current tobacco-related policies and policymaker support/opposition, key issues raised, and other insights from public meetings	Census of City of Susanville and Lassen County meeting records (pre-intervention research) and meetings during which policy is discussed	Evaluation Consultant (Appendices A & B)	Content analysis	Year 1 One wave each
Key Informant Interviews	To collect information regarding facilitators and barriers to adopting a TRL	Purposive sample of 3 City of Susanville key staff and 2 county supervisors <sup>2</sup>	Evaluation Consultant (Appendix C)	Content Analysis	Year 1 One wave
Public Opinion Survey	To understand knowledge, attitudes, and perception of the community regarding illegal sales of tobacco to guide campaign interventions	Convenience sample of 105 Lassen County residents (including 6 in the Spanish language)	Evaluation Consultant (Appendices D & E)	Descriptive statistics	Year 1 One wave
California Student Tobacco Survey (CSTS)	To assess use, knowledge, and attitudes toward tobacco products and marijuana use	Random sample of 567 students from 4 county schools	UC San Diego (Appendix F)	Descriptive Statistics	Year 1 One wave
Statewide HSHC Store Observation Survey	Measure the availability of various tobacco products	Census of 29 Lassen County tobacco retail stores	Stanford University	Descriptive statistics	Year 2 One wave
Statewide HSHC Public Opinion Survey	Measure public opinion on policy issues in the retail environment	Convenience sample of 132 Lassen County residents	TCEC	Descriptive statistics	Year 3 One wave
Statewide HSHC Key Informant Interviews	Measure the level of support and opposition to a variety of tobacco control issues, including a retailer density policy	Purposive sample of 7 policymakers, key community leaders, and retailer	TCEC	Descriptive statistics and content analysis	Year 3 One wave
Statewide HSHC Media Activity Record	Measure the level of support or opposition, as well as reach	Purposive sample of 5 print and online media outlets	TCEC	Descriptive statistics and content analysis	Years 1–4 Four waves

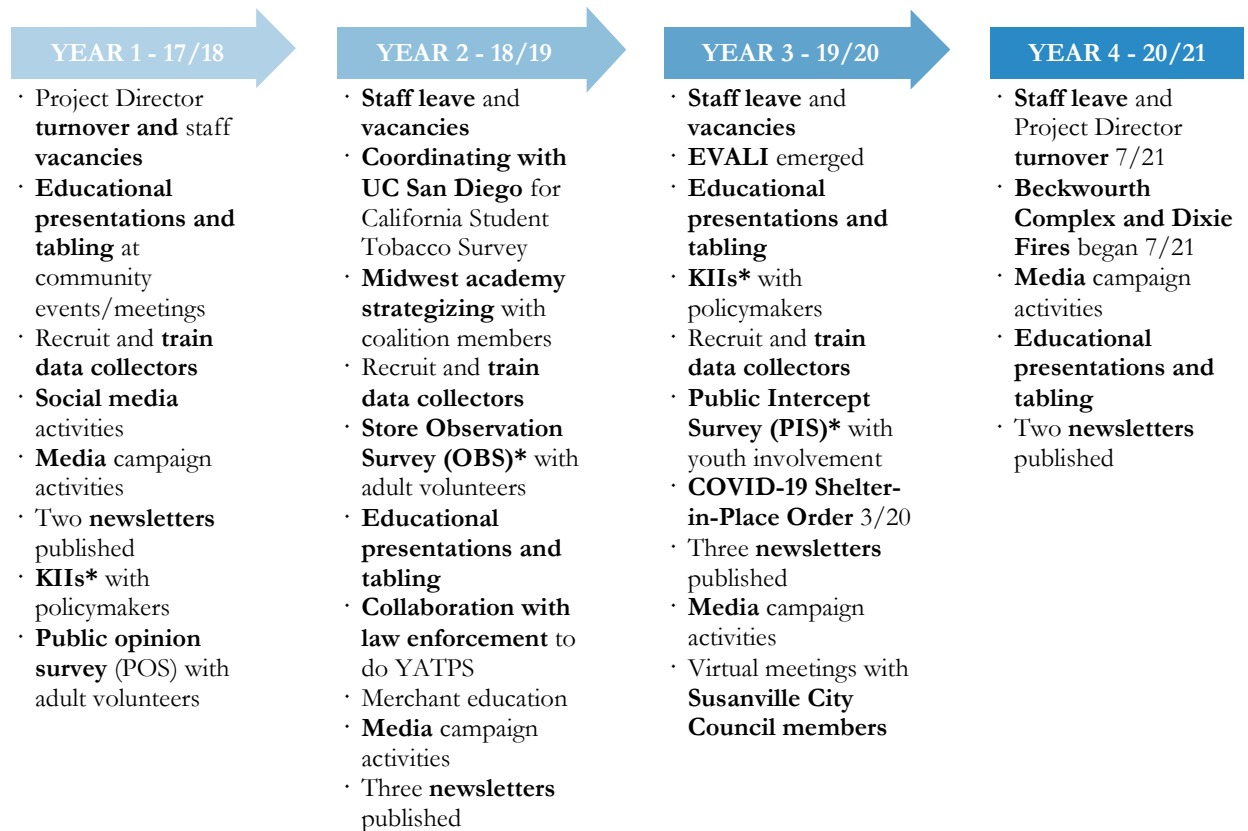
<sup>1</sup> Standardized instruments provided by Stanford University, the California Department of Public Health, and the Tobacco Control Evaluation Center were used without modifications and, for that reason, are not included in the Appendices. Six local questions were added to the statewide instrument used by the University of California, San Diego for Lassen County and are provided in Appendix F.

<sup>2</sup> The City of Susanville Council members were contacted for interviews, but no interviews were obtained.

## IMPLEMENTATION AND RESULTS

The sequence of intervention and evaluation activities was designed so that early actions laid the foundation for progress forward, informing the timing, messaging and strategies of activities that followed. Exhibit 3 provides an overview of the project activity timeline, including key events, in chronological order.

**Exhibit 3. Key Intervention and Evaluation Activities in Chronological Order**



\*Evaluation activity that was part of a statewide data collection effort coordinated by the California Tobacco Control Program among all Local Lead Agencies in California.

### *Staff turnover and vacancies*

In the first six months of the scope of work, intervention activities were interrupted and ultimately delayed due to turnover of the Project Director (PD) position and staff vacancies. The PD position turned over in the first four months of the work plan. In small rural counties, tobacco prevention staff wear many hats. For that reason, when a viral meningitis outbreak occurred in the community, the focus was shifted from a transition and onboarding process to dealing with the outbreak. Although an administrative clerk was part of the program and provided some assistance, the Coalition and Community Engagement Coordinator and Media Specialist positions were vacant for most of the first year. The lack of staff did not make it impossible to move forward. But it limited the amount of work that could be done in the first year of the program.



### *Outreach, recruitment, and engagement*

To educate the community and recruit community members and local organizations to get involved in tobacco control efforts, LCTURP did a combination of outreach presentations and tabling at local community events starting in the first year of the work plan. Outreach presentations, which lasted anywhere from 10–15 minutes in length, depending on the group and the time allowed, were conducted at a variety of local organizations, e.g., Salvation Army, Soroptimist International of Susanville, Northeastern Rural Health Clinic, Lassen Community College, Lassen Works, and school parent meetings. Project staff also participated in local community events, e.g., Headstart’s Fairgrounds Health Fair, Banner Lassen Family Fun Olympics, Northeastern Rural Health Fair, Wellness Week at Lassen Community College, and Super Hero Run, as examples. Persons visiting the project’s table were provided with materials on tobacco retail licensing, flavored tobacco products, and the results of the most recent store observation and public opinion survey data.

In addition to making presentations and tabling, the project created a newsletter to educate the community on tobacco issues, e.g., tobacco laws, public opinion survey results, and cessation resources. A copy of one newsletter is provided in Appendix G. The distribution list, which grew over the course of the 2017–2021 work plan, included coalition members, all health and human services departments (i.e., Public Health, Mental Health, Behavioral Health and Substance Use Disorders), county departments (i.e., County Administrative Offices, Environmental Health, Adult Protective Services, Child Protective Services, In Home Health Services), and local nonprofits (e.g., Lassen Family Services). The newsletter was also posted on the Lassen County website, the project’s webpage, the project’s Facebook page, and distributed at community events.

### *Engaging policymakers and conducting key informant interviews*

Toward the end of the project’s first year, in April–May 2018, LCTURP met with policymakers and key community leaders to conduct key informant interviews. The purpose of the interviews was to explore policymaker views on a tobacco retailer license policy and prohibiting the sale and distribution of flavored tobacco products. The target group was the City of Susanville officials. However, because interviews were not obtained with Susanville City Council members (only key staff), the project contacted county supervisors. Information from the California Tobacco Control Program regarding the dangers of flavored tobacco products and how flavors make it more enticing to use nicotine products were highlighted during the discussion. Local, regional, and statewide results from the 2016 Healthy Stores campaign were also included to show that flavored tobacco products are readily available in local stores.

LCTURP found that of the three purposively selected city staff and two county officials, two were conditionally supportive of a tobacco retail licensing policy; a county supervisor and the Susanville Police Chief. The conditional support was based on how the licensing fees would be used. One informant said:

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*“I would be in favor of a TRL if the funds were being used for enforcement. I wouldn’t want it to be like the Lee Laws, which don’t really seem to be enforced.”*

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However, the supportive county supervisor thought enforcement would fall on the hands of the

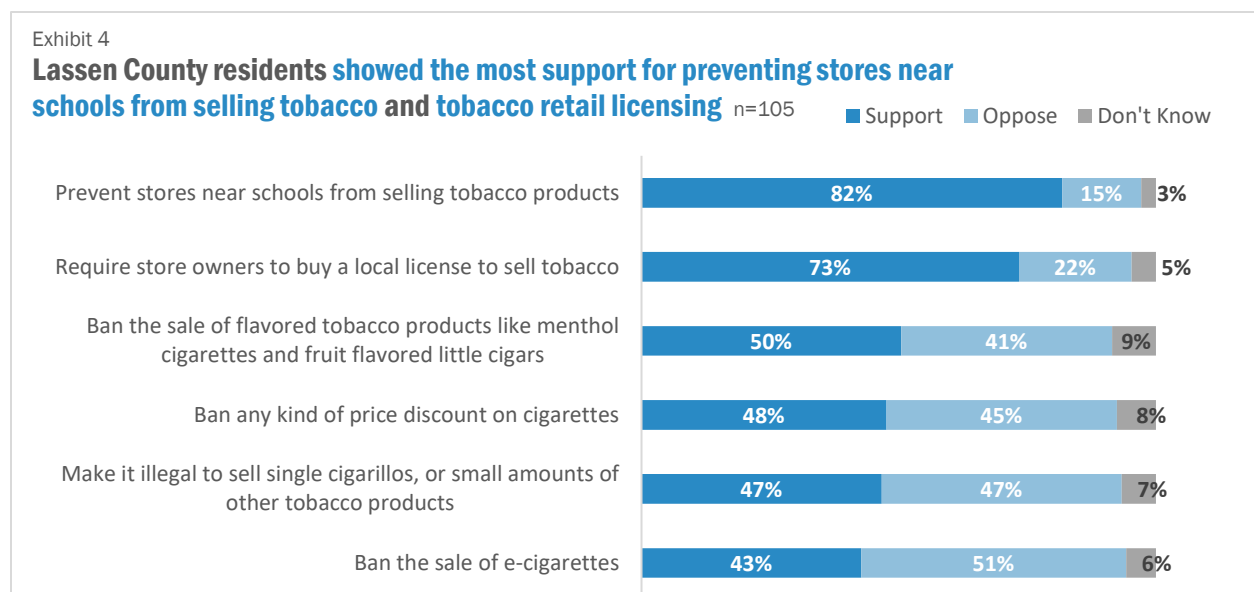
police and the City of Susanville to regulate, saying that, “the county has very little to do with regulations and we don’t have the grounds for enforcement.” For that reason, the project would need to get both the city officials *and* the board of supervisors in support of a TRL. Since one of the county supervisors is a tobacco retailer, this would be a challenge.

Although LCTURP hoped that the key informant interviews would uncover a policy champion, the project realized that it would have to gather public opinion information, evidence of illegal sales to minors in the community, and use this information to conduct extensive community and policymaker education.

*Public opinion regarding tobacco retail licensing*

To explore public sentiment about a variety of tobacco-related policies, LCTURP conducted a public opinion survey with a convenience sample of adults (n=105), 18 years of age or older, who live in Lassen County. Project staff and two adult volunteers collected the data using an instrument developed by the project’s Evaluation Consultant and an intercept survey methodology and handheld devices to collect the data. The survey was conducted in Spanish, as well as English, and six Spanish-speaking residents participated. A total of 11 items were assessed including support for or opposition to policy approaches aimed at regulating tobacco retailers. All data were collected between May and July 2018 in six different communities—Susanville, Westwood, Bieber, Little Valley, Coyle, and Herlong—at a variety of locations and community events (e.g., local farmer’s markets, food distribution centers, restaurants, family resource centers, the county office’s, schools, Lassen Community College, and the senior center).

As illustrated in Exhibit 4, the majority of residents was in support of preventing stores near schools from selling tobacco products (82%) and requiring store owners to buy a local license to sell tobacco (73%). However, there was less support for banning flavored tobacco products (50%), price discounts (48%), single cigarillos (47%), and e-cigarettes (43%). These views were likely influenced by the fact that a whopping 42% of survey participants indicated they had used tobacco products within the last 30 days.



The project intended to share this information through traditional and social media channels, as well as with policymakers. However, due to the staffing challenges mentioned earlier in this report, this information was not shared with policy makers or coalition members, and was not included in fact sheets or other educational materials.

### *Strategizing with the coalition*

In addition to gathering evidence through the public opinion survey and key informant interviews, other pre-intervention activities defined in the work plan included: 1) a policy-planning session with the adult coalition members to develop a Midwest Academy Strategy Chart, defining goals, organizational considerations, as well as constituents, allies, opponents, targets, and tactics; and 2) a Communications Plan, identifying communication objectives, target audiences, and tactics (paid advertising, earned media, and social media). Because of staff turnover and onboarding new staff, these two activities were not completed until October 2018, in year two.

The purpose of the strategy session was to think through the process necessary to get a TRL/Flavors Ban adopted in at least one jurisdiction of Lassen County, which included trying to flesh out information about policymakers to identify a potential policy champion. Participants focused on the City of Susanville as the target jurisdiction, based on the belief that there may be openness to regulating the retail environment. This was based largely on the city's interest in a Department of Justice (DOJ) grant to conduct stings on illegal sales to youth. As a result of the strategizing session, the project knew it would need to gather evidence of illegal sales to minors and the prevalence of flavored tobacco products in local stores.

### *Collaboration with law enforcement*

LCTURP planned to conduct two rounds of the YATPS, pre-intervention and post-policy adoption. However, in spring 2019, toward the end of the project's second year, LCTURP learned that county policies prohibited volunteers from riding in county vehicles and a background check needed to be obtained for all volunteers. For these reasons, the project modified the work plan to eliminate the YATPS and worked with the City of Susanville Police Department to conduct the survey since the Police Department received a DOJ grant for that reason. In spring 2019, two YATPS rounds were conducted. The first round resulted in two retailers selling tobacco products to the underage minor. There were no illegal sales in the second round. Project staff followed-up with educational visits to each of the two merchants that sold, and provided them with information on tobacco laws, as well as age-of-sale warning signs. Around this same time, there was staff turnover and the Project Director went on leave. For these reasons, details and documentation regarding the illegal sales rate, the number of retailers in the City of Susanville that were included in each round, how they were selected, etc., was not determined nor was documentation found. Nonetheless, based the information available, it appeared that the illegal sales rate was low, which was unlikely to compel local lawmakers in this rural county to adopt a TRL.

### *Store observations*

Between May and June 2019, at the end of the project's second year, LCTURP conducted the HSHC store observations with the help of the trained adult coalition members. The project opted to

survey a census of the 29 tobacco retailers throughout the county for this statewide data collection effort. The store observation survey was conducted using the standard instrument and protocol that were provided by Stanford University, and were used without modifications.

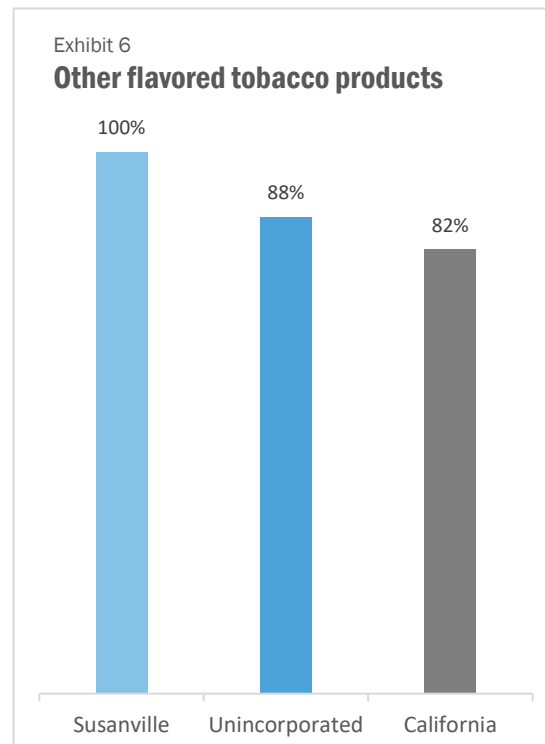
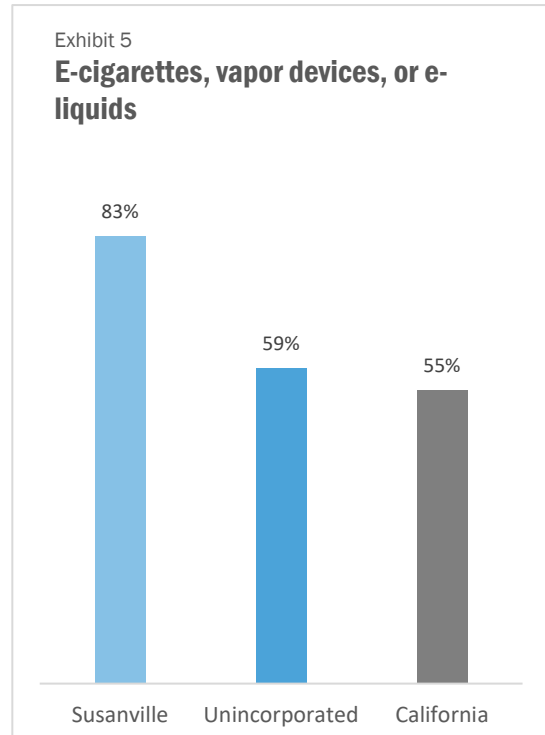
Important to LCTURP’s work was a measure of the availability of different tobacco products. During the 2019 observation survey, it was no surprise that almost every retailer (97%) sold tobacco products like cigarettes, chew, and cigarillos. However, what was noteworthy was the presence of e-cigarettes with the majority of stores in Susanville (83%) and the unincorporated area of the county (59%) carrying them (Exhibit 5), both of which were higher than the state average (55%). The availability of e-cigarettes in retail stores is concerning because it makes it easier for youth to access these products.

The tobacco retailer observation survey also showed that the majority of stores carried flavored tobacco products with 100% of the stores in Susanville and 88% in the unincorporated area carrying fruit, liquor, and mint flavors (Exhibit 6). Flavored products mask the harsh taste of tobacco, making it much easier for youth to get hooked on nicotine (Cullen, J. et al., 2011).

Unfortunately, LCTURP was unable to use these findings in presentations and fact sheets with policymakers as the data was embargoed until June 2020 due the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the planned statewide media release. Nonetheless, the information was shared with adult coalition members.

### *Tobacco use among Lassen County youth*

To determine tobacco use prevalence among local youth, LCTURP participated in a statewide survey fielded by the University of California, San Diego, during the 2017–2018 school year. A total of 567 Lassen County 7<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade students: one high school, one middle school and two combination schools (7<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade), were randomly selected and included in the study. The survey was conducted from May to December 2018. The main findings of the survey were the following (Zhu, S-H, et al., 2019):



- E-cigarettes were the most popular tobacco product with 14.5% of Lassen County students using them in the past 30 days.
- Current use of any tobacco product was relatively high at 19.4%, which was largely due to the high rate of e-cigarette use.
- Use of multiple products was common, with approximately half of tobacco users currently using two or more tobacco products.
- A majority (64.6%) of students in Lassen County believe it is easy to obtain e-cigarettes or cigarettes.
- A large majority (86.8%) of students use a flavored tobacco product. *Fruit or sweet* was the most popular flavor for e-cigarette use, *fruit or sweet* and *mint* were popular for combustible tobacco, while *mint* was the most popular for smokeless tobacco.

Given that 83% of Susanville tobacco retailers and 59% of those in the unincorporated area sell vaping products, this was the evidence that LCTURP needed to show the need for regulating the retail environment. Furthermore, in the following months, during the summer of 2019, the e-cigarette or vaping use-associated lung injury, commonly known as EVALI, generated national news coverage, and concern. This highlighted potentially severe or deadly effects from e-cigarettes and other vaping devices, the alarmingly increasing rate of youth vaping, and that almost all (96%) of kids who vape use a flavored tobacco product (California Student Tobacco Survey, 2019–2020). However, due to staff leave and vacancies, follow-up education was not done with policymakers or the community.

### *Engaging Susanville policymakers and conducting key informant interviews*

Between October and December 2019, in the project's third year, LCTURP met with policymakers in the City of Susanville to conduct key informant interviews and collect information as part of the HSHC statewide data collection effort. Seven to 10 interviews were the goal. A total of 11 were attempted. However, after repeated tries to schedule with policymakers, project staff cast a wider net resulting in seven interviews completed with purposively selected informants in the City of Susanville: three policymakers, one retailer, and three influential community members. LCTURP found that the majority:

- Support eliminating the sales of flavored tobacco products (6 of 7 informants)
- Support a local tobacco retailer license (5 of 7 informants)
- Support eliminating the sale of vaping products (5 of 7 informants)

However, the informants also appeared uncomfortable when answering some questions, which could be due to their lack of understanding of how the retail policies will improve public health. These results suggested that the project should educate decision makers and community leaders about the connection between point-of-sales findings in the report and health problems associated with high sales of unhealthy products. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and redirection of project staff to contact tracing and other duties, follow-up education was not done.

*Public opinion on various tobacco-related issues*

Between September and December 2019, in the project's year three, LCTURP implemented a public opinion survey to explore public sentiment about a variety of tobacco policy options. Three project staff members and three adult volunteers collected the data via a public intercept survey methodology utilized in Arbuckle, Maxwell, and Colusa at four different community events. The public opinion survey data collection instrument was provided by TCEC as part of the statewide data collection for the HSHC statewide initiative and was used without modification. Among the items assessed were the availability of cigarettes, chew, and other products in community stores and support for/opposition to various tobacco-related policies.

Exhibit 7 shows the perception of availability of products from a convenience sample of 132 Lassen County residents (58 from Susanville and 74 from the unincorporated communities). Note that there is a different perception of availability than actual availability of products. For example, only 53% of respondents indicated that other non-tobacco flavored tobacco products were readily available in stores. However, the store observation survey identified that a higher percentage (100% and 88%, respectively) of the stores in the Susanville and the unincorporated area carried these products. This information showed the need for more community education to raise awareness among the general public.

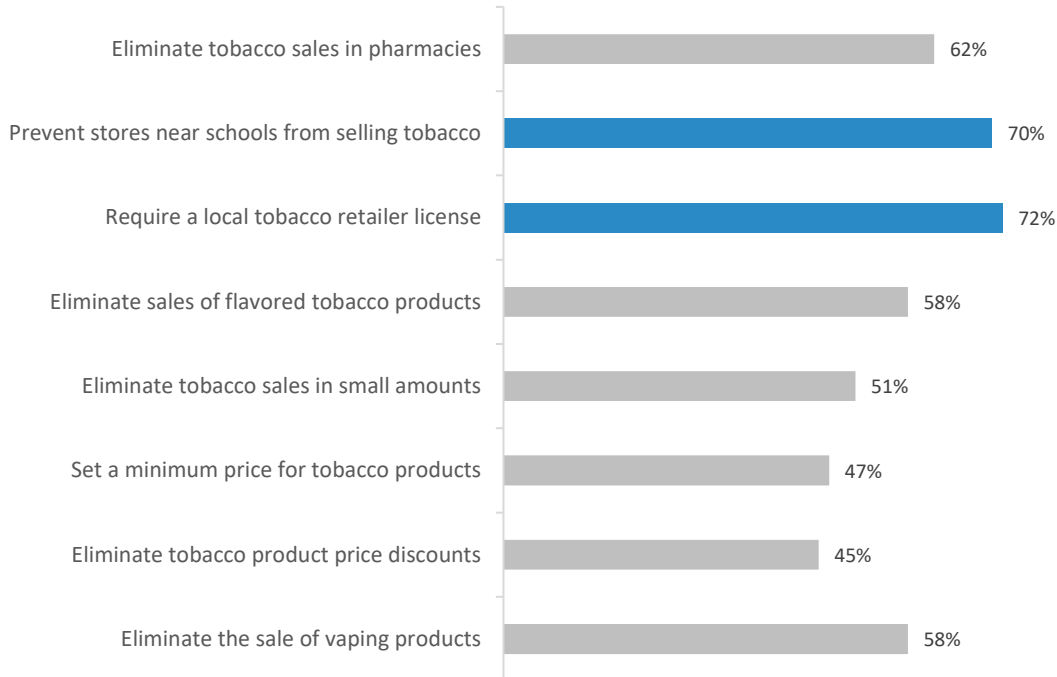


Lassen county residents showed the most support for preventing stores near schools from selling tobacco (70%) and requiring retailers to have a local license (72%) (Exhibit 8). These results are consistent with the public opinion survey in year one of the project.

Exhibit 8

### Lassen County residents show the most support for preventing stores near schools from selling tobacco and a tobacco retailer license

2019, n=132



As with the HSHC store observation data, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and redirection of project staff to contact tracing and other duties, this information was not shared with the coalition or in follow-up education in the community and/or with policymakers.

#### *Conducting educational sessions with Susanville lawmakers*

The Susanville City Council, as well as the Lassen County Board of Supervisors, meetings were closed to the public due to the COVID-19 pandemic stay-at-home orders that were executed in March 2020. However, in June 2020, project staff met with four of the five Susanville City Council members in virtual one-on-one meetings. As part of the meeting, staff highlighted the benefits of tobacco retailer licensing and a ban on flavored tobacco products. Unfortunately, all four of the city council members believed that regulating and taxing retailers was “not necessary at this time,” although one requested more information, studies, and statistics on findings in similar communities. Two members indicated that they might be willing to pursue a flavored tobacco products ban in the future, but with the COVID-19 pandemic and businesses already suffering as a result, they would not support it at this time.

Project staff intended to find information regarding TRL policies in similar counties. However, two staff members went on leave, the Media Specialist resigned, and LCTURP was back to being a skeleton crew.

### *Using media to educate the community*

In the first 2-1/2 years of the work plan, despite staff turnover and leaves, LCTURP did a considerable amount of community education and outreach by conducting presentations and tabling at community events. The project also utilized paid digital, print, and social media ads in the form of movie theater ads, digital banners, and boosts to the project's Facebook page posts. Due to the challenges and barriers encountered throughout the work plan discussed elsewhere in this document, the project reallocated resources that were not originally in the budget to digital media. All ads used were created by the California Tobacco Control Program and included "Flavors" and "Flavored Nicotine=Brain Poison." For that reason, no local consumer testing was required. (See Appendix H for an example.)

Two digital movie theater ads were placed at Susanville cinemas. Ads were run throughout the duration of the work plan, with the exception of three months in 2020 when theaters were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The annual reach of the views at the movie theater was estimated to be 118,000. Print ads were also placed in a variety of local media, including the *Mountain Valley Living Magazine*, on shopping carts at grocery stores, and coffee sleeves at local coffee shops regarding the dangers of flavored tobacco products.

Social media posts (both boosted posts and ads) were also utilized and averaged one post per week during the entire work plan except during the vacancy of the Media Specialist in early 2021, during which time posts dipped to one every two weeks on average. Over the 2017–2021 work plan, the project made an average of 33 posts a year, specifically about TRL and/or a flavored tobacco products and Facebook fans grew from a 69 to a high of 262.

Unfortunately, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the *Lassen County Times*, the only print newspaper in the county, stopped distributing hardcopy newspapers due to financial reasons. However, the project used its other media, including its newsletter, to continue to educate the public.

Originally, the 2019 Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community Store Observation Survey data was to be released in a statewide press event, in which LCTURP staff would have participated. However, COVID-19 inundated all media coverage, so results were released via a refreshed website.

### *Sharing results*

Key findings throughout the 2017–2021 work plan were shared with various audiences in the form of project updates, briefings, et cetera, including coalition members and other CTCF-funded projects.

### *The Beckwourth Complex Fires and Dixie Fires*

In the final year of the project, the Beckwourth Complex and Dixie Fires ignited in northeastern California, including Lassen County. These wildfires caused poor air quality, power outages, and, because of the power outages, water outages, since water cannot be pumped out of wells without electricity. Staff rotated working at evaluation shelters and oxygen centers while simultaneously dealing with power outages at their own homes. Two staff members subsequently left the program.



Suffice it to say, throughout the 2017–2021 work plan, project staff endured extreme personal and professional difficulties.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

LCTURP’s objective was not met. To date, neither of the two jurisdictions in Lassen County—the City of Susanville or the unincorporated area—have adopted and implemented a tobacco retail licensing policy that prohibits the sale of flavored tobacco products. LCTURP staff endured extreme personal and professional difficulties through staff vacancies, leaves, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Beckwourth Complex and Dixie fires. These circumstances impacted the project such that intervention and evaluation activities were delayed, partially completed, or not completed at all, making it difficult to build momentum.

In the first couple of years of the work plan, several factors were initially helpful in moving the objective forward. Project staff did a considerable amount of public education, which is critical to changing social norms in communities. The use of paid ads and boosted ads on social media were very effective, as was the use of a project newsletter.

Had the project completed the Midwest Academy Strategy planning, developed a Communications Plan, developed educational “kits” at the beginning of the scope of work period, shared emerging data as it became available, e.g., the California Student Tobacco Survey, or leveraged the emergence of EVALI to introduce a ban on the sale of vaping products, it may have helped the project have a greater impact on tobacco retail licensing and a flavors ban, as well as have more success obtaining interviews with, scheduling one-on-one educational sessions with, and making a formal presentation to policymakers. Future work should include completing these preparatory steps in the first six months of the work plan and seeking technical assistance from CTCP, the statewide technical assistance centers, and the project’s evaluator, to help get ready and enable the project to be responsive to requests from lawmakers.

It is clear that LCTURP’s efforts to educate the community have been working, as shown by the consistent support among the public for various tobacco-related policies in the public opinion surveys, including TRL. Although public support does not always translate into policymaker support, it shows that attitudes are changing.

**Next steps.** For the 2022–2025 work plan, the project intends to focus on a ban on flavored tobacco products as part of its End Commercial Tobacco Campaign objective.

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## APPENDICES

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## APPENDIX A

### Policy Record Review - Pre-Intervention Research Instrument

#### Tobacco-Related Policies Considered

Policy	Key Decision Maker In office when policy was adopted	Office Information Years in office, term end date	Vote on Tobacco Related Policy	Summary of Policy Adopted, if any

#### Polymaker Biographical Record/Voting Record

Name	Alliances/Interests	Voting Record Issues For	Voting Record Issues Against	Persuasive Arguments

#### City Council Meeting Records

Mtg Date + Source	Agenda Items	Key Points	Council member Position +/-/N	How This Can Be Used?

## APPENDIX B

### Policy Record Review – Policy Adoption Process Instrument

The purpose of this evaluation activity is to document policymaker support/opposition, key issues raised by policymakers and City staff, and other insights from public policy meetings. Staff will observe and record this information during the meetings. In addition, official policy records such as city council agendas, meeting minutes, City staff presentations, testimony, and policies enacted will be collected and coded to track: 1) support/opposition; 2) key issues that surface during the intervention, which could help shape changes to the intervention plan during the process; 3) the policy adoption process so that it can be described in the final evaluation report; and 4) to confirm adoption of a policy that meets the objective for this project.

#### POLICYMAKER MEETING RECORDS

1. Month/year: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Supervisors/Council members present/absent: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Others present: \_\_\_\_\_
4. What item on the agenda related to tobacco control:
5. What issues were raised during the discussion of the tobacco control item:

Issues Raised in Support [Individuals(s) raising issue]	Issues Raised in Opposition [Individuals(s) raising issue]

6. Outcome: \_\_\_\_\_
7. Other agenda items/discussions relevant to the work of the project: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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## APPENDIX C

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### Pre-Intervention Key Informant Interviews – Tobacco Retail Licensing Instrument

*Protocol:* Introduce yourself. Explain why you're there, define why this informant was sought out, how information will be used, and request permission to record for note-taking purposes or – if not recording – inform person that you will be taking/typing notes. Assure the informant that contact information will not be shared with solicitors and that all responses will be anonymous.

#### *Sample Introduction*

*“Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am calling on behalf of the Lassen County Public Health Department. Thank you for agreeing to talk with me. I am gathering information from city council members, the city manager, law enforcement and other key leaders in Susanville to assess perceptions about instituting a policy in Susanville to reduce youth access to tobacco products. We value your opinion on this issue. Your responses will be combined with others and shared as a whole, with individual identifying information held confidential.*

1. For City STAFF only: Can you tell me a little about **your roles and responsibilities** within the city government?
2. There are currently 133 jurisdictions in California that have taken action to reduce youth access to tobacco products through a tobacco retail licensing program, including the [nearby county/city], which is very similar to Susanville. The license is similar to the license required of retailers to sell alcohol. Retailers who want to sell tobacco and flavored products would have to apply and pay for this license. **Would you be in support of or opposed to the adoption of a tobacco retailer licensing policy in Susanville?**  
[Probe: Why or why not?]
3. If the informant is not initially supportive of any such policy or is tentative, ask: **Are there any conditions under which you would support a policy that requires retailers to get a license to sell tobacco products?** [i.e., what might convince you?]
4. **What arguments can be made in favor of this type of policy?** [Probe: who or what groups are likely to be in favor of such a policy?]
5. **What arguments can be made in opposition to this type of policy?** [Probe: who or what groups are likely to be against such a policy?]
6. **What challenges or barriers might there be in adopting a tobacco retail licensing policy in Susanville?** If so, how do you think they could be overcome?
7. **Can you suggest other administration or staff members or groups that are likely to be influential on this issue?** [Possible probe: Would they be likely supporters or champions of efforts to pass a tobacco retailer licensing policy – or likely oppose it?]
8. **What is the next step in the process of considering a tobacco retailer licensing policy?**

#### **Demographics**

In many cases, the demographic information for policy makers and public figures is published. You can fill in the information ahead of time if you can obtain these answers from a public profile or website.

**Just a couple more questions, these are for demographic purposes only.**

*Read aloud each question, but not the responses. Provide the responses if the informant hesitates. More than one category can be chosen. If the response does not fall into the listed categories, you can type in their answer in the text box next to “other.”*

1. **What is your zip code?** \_\_\_\_\_
2. **What is your age?** \_\_\_\_\_
3. **Which category best describes your race?**
  - a. American Indian/Alaska Native
  - b. Asian
  - c. Black or African American
  - d. Hispanic/Latino
  - e. Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander
  - f. White
  - g. Some other race \_\_\_\_\_
  - h. Decline to state *[don't read]*
4. **Male or female?** *[don't read]*
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
  - c. In another way: \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. Decline to state *[don't read]*
5. **Did you use tobacco products (i.e., cigarettes, chew, cigars, e-cigarettes) in the last 30 days?**
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Decline to state *[don't read]*
6. **Did you use electronic nicotine devices (e.g., e-cigarettes, e-hookah, e-pens, vape devices, etc.) in the last 30 days?**
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Decline to state *[don't read]*
7. **Do you have children under 18 living with you?**
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Decline to state *[don't read]*

8. Last question, how would you describe your political leaning, for instance, do you see yourself as being very conservative, conservative, moderate, liberal, or very liberal?
- a. Very conservative
  - b. Conservative
  - c. Moderate
  - d. Liberal
  - e. Very Liberal
  - f. Don't Know
  - g. Refused

**That concludes my questions. Thank you for sharing your insights. *[Explain how talking with them was helpful and what you learned from them]*. Do you have any questions for me?**



## APPENDIX D

### Public Opinion Survey – Tobacco Retail Licensing/Flavors Instrument - English

The Lassen County Public Health Department wants to know your opinions about stores in Lassen County and the City of Susanville that sell tobacco. We have some questions for you about our stores and about proposed changes. The questions will take 2-3 minutes of your time and the survey is completely anonymous. You are free to stop participating in the survey at any time.

**Screen 1: Are you a resident of Lassen County?**

1. Yes
2. No (This will end the survey)

**Screen 2: What is your zip code?**

96056 Little Valley	96117 Litchfield	Spaulding
96009 Bieber	96121 Milford	96132 Termo
96068 Nubieber	96123 Ravendale	96136 Wendel
96109 Doyle	96127 Susanville	96137 Westwood, Lake Almanor,
96113 Herlong, Patton Village	96128 Standish	Clear Creek
96114 Janesville	96130 Susanville, Johnstonville,	Other (This will end the survey.)

**Screen 3: Which category best describes your age?**

- |  |                     |
|--|---------------------|
| 1. Under 18 (This will end the survey) | 5. 50-59            |
| 2. 18-29                               | 6. 60-65            |
| 3. 30-39                               | 7. Older than 65    |
| 4. 40-49                               | 8. Decline to state |

The next set of questions ask about your support for or opposition to new policies to change the ways that stores promote and sell tobacco products.

Q1. Stores often promote cigarettes and other tobacco products by giving price discounts, like two packages for the price of one. Would you support or oppose a law that bans any kind of price discount on cigarettes?

1. Support
2. Oppose
3. I don't know (don't read)

Q2. Tobacco companies sell single-serving tobacco products, like little cigars, to reduce the cost and make tobacco more accessible. Would you support or oppose a law that makes it illegal to sell single cigarillos, or small amounts of other tobacco products?

1. Support
2. Oppose
3. I don't know (don't read)

Q3. Would you support or oppose a law requiring store owners to buy a local license to sell tobacco? The license fees would cover the cost of checking whether stores follow tobacco and alcohol laws.

1. Support
2. Oppose
3. I don't know (don't read)

Q4. Would you support or oppose a law to ban the sale of flavored tobacco products like menthol cigarettes and fruit flavored little cigars?

1. Support
- 2.
3. Oppose
4. I don't know (don't read)

Q5. E-cigarettes are used to vape tobacco, marijuana and THC liquids. Would you support or oppose a law to ban the sale of e-cigarettes?

1. Support
2. Oppose
3. I don't know (don't read)

Q6. Would you support or oppose a law to prevent stores near schools from selling tobacco products?

1. Support
2. Oppose
3. I don't know (don't read)

Q7. Would you support or oppose a law forbidding the use of tobacco products, including e-cigarettes, in county parks?

1. Support
2. Oppose
3. I don't know (don't read)

Q8. Would you support or oppose a law banning the use of tobacco products, including e-cigarettes, on local college campuses?

1. Support
2. Oppose
3. I don't know (don't read)

Now I would like to ask you a few questions about yourself. Remember that your answers will remain anonymous.

Q9. Which category best describes your race/ethnicity?

1. White
2. Hispanic/Latino
3. American Indian/Alaska Native
4. Asian
5. Black or African American
6. Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander
7. Decline to state (don't read)
8. Some other race \_\_\_\_\_

Q10. Which category best describes your gender?

1. Male
2. Female
3. Some other way
4. Decline to state (don't read)

Q11. Have you used any tobacco or nicotine products in the last 30 days?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Decline to state (don't read)

Thank you for participating in this survey.

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## APPENDIX E

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### Public Opinion Survey – Tobacco Retail Licensing/Flavors Instrument – Spanish

El Condado de Lassen Departamento de Salud Publica quiere saber tus opiniones sobre tiendas que venden Tabaco en el Condado de Lassen y la ciudad de Susanville. Tenemos unas preguntas para usted sobre las tiendas y propuestos cambios. Estas preguntas tomara 2-3 minutos de su tiempo y la encuesta es completamente anónimo. Puede dejar de participar en esta encuesta en cualquier momento.

**Pantalla 1: ¿Eres residente del Condado de Lassen?**

1. Si
2. No (esto terminara la encuesta)

**Pantalla 2: ¿Cuál es su código Postal?**

96056 Little Valley	96117 Litchfield	Spaulding
96009 Bieber	96121 Milford	96132 Termo
96068 Nubieber	96123 Ravendale	96136 Wendel
96109 Doyle	96127 Susanville	96137 Westwood, Lake
96113 Herlong, Patton Village	96128 Standish	Almanor, Clear Creek
96114 Janesville	96130 Susanville, Johnstonville,	Other (This will end the survey.)

**Pantalla 3: ¿Cual categoría mejor describir su edad?**

- |   |                                  |
|---|----------------------------------|
| 1. Menos de 18 (Esto terminara la encuesta) | 5. 50-59                         |
| 2. 18-29                                    | 6. 60-65                         |
| 3. 30-39                                    | 7. Mayor de 65                   |
| 4. 40-49                                    | 8. Negarse a responder (no leer) |

Las siguientes preguntas son sobre su apoyo u oposición acerca de nuevas pólizas que ayudan a cambiar la manera tiendas promuevan y venden sus productos de Tabaco.

Q1. ¿Tiendas normalmente promueven cigarrillos y otros productos que contienen Tabaco con descuentos, ejemplo dos paquetes al precio de uno. Usted apoyaría o opondría una ley que prohíbe este tipo de descuentos en cigarrillos?

1. Apoyo
2. Opondría
3. No se (no leer)

Q2. ¿Compañías de Tabaco venden productos individuales, como cigarrillos pequeños, para reducir el costo y hacer el Tabaco más accesible. Usted apoyaría o opondría una ley que hace ilegal vender cigarrillos sueltos, o pequeñas cantidades de Tabaco?

1. Apoyo
2. Opondría
3. No se (no leer)

Q3. ¿Usted apoyaría u opusiera una ley que requiere que dueños de tiendas compren una licencia para vender tabaco? Estas tarifas cubrieran el costo de revisar que estas tiendas están siguiendo las leyes de Tabaco y alcohol.

1. Apoyo
2. Opondria
3. No se (no leer)

Q4. ¿Usted apoyaría u opusiera una ley que prohíbe la venta de productos de Tabaco que tienen sabores, como productos mentolados y cigarrillos con sabores de frutas?

1. Apoyo
2. Opondria
3. No se (no leer)

Q5. Cigarros electrónicos son usado para fumar Tabaco, marihuana y líquidos que contienen THC. ¿Usted apoyaría u opusiera una ley que prohíbe la venta de cigarros electrónicos?

1. Apoyo
2. Opondria
3. No se (no leer)

Q6. ¿Usted apoyaría u opusiera una ley que prohíbe la venta de Tabaco en tiendas cerca de las escuelas?

1. Apoyo
2. Opondria
3. No se (no leer)

Q7. ¿Usted apoyaría u opusiera una ley que prohíbe el uso de productos que contienen tabaco, incluyendo cigarros electrónicos, en parques del condado?

1. Apoyo
2. Opondria
3. No se (no leer)

Q8. ¿Usted apoyaría u opusiera una ley que prohíbe el uso de productos que contienen tabaco, incluyendo cigarros electrónicos, en una universidad local?

1. Apoyo
2. Opondria
3. No se (no leer)

Ahora me gustaria hacerte unas preguntas sobre usted. Recuerda todas estas preguntas son anonimas.

Q9. ¿Cual categoria mejor describir su raza?

1. Blanco
2. Hispano/Latino
3. Indio Americano
4. Asiatico
5. Negro
6. Nativo de Hawaii /o islas del Pacifico
7. Negarse a responder (no leer)
8. Otra raza (no leer) \_\_\_\_\_

Q10. ¿Cual categoría mejor describir su genero?

1. Masculino
2. Femenino
3. Otro genero

4. Negarse a responder (no leer)

Q11. ¿Ha consumido productos que contienen Tabaco o nicotina in los últimos 30 días?

1. Si
2. No
3. Negarse a responder (no leereer) Gracias por participar en esta encuesta.

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## APPENDIX F

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### Questions Added to the California Student Tobacco Survey

Do any of your family or household members use smokeless tobacco (chew, dip, snuff, or snus)?

- A. Yes
- B. No
- C. I prefer not to answer

You mentioned earlier that you had visited convenience stores or small markets in the last 30 days. When you did, how often did you see ads or promotions for FLAVORED tobacco products?

- A. Never
- B. Rarely
- C. Sometimes
- D. Most of the time
- E. Always
- F. I prefer not to answer

Were any of those stores where you saw ads or promotions for FLAVORED tobacco products WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE of your school?

- A. Yes
- B. No
- C. I don't know
- D. I prefer not to answer

On how many of the past 7 days did you smell tobacco smoke from someone else's cigarette, cigar, or pipe drifting into your home from nearby apartments or from outside?

- A. 0 days
- B. 1 days
- C. 2 days
- D. 3 days
- E. 4 days
- F. 5 days
- G. 6 days
- H. All 7 days
- I. I prefer not to answer

**These next questions will ask about the beverages you drank YESTERDAY, including both at meals and for snacks.**

How many glasses or cans of sweetened fruit drinks, sports drinks, or energy drinks, did you drink yesterday? Do not include 100% fruit juices.

- A. 0
- B. 1
- C. 2

- D. 3
- E. More than 3
- F. I prefer not to answer

How many glasses or cans of soda that contain sugar, such as Coke, did you drink yesterday? Do not include diet soda.

- A. 0
- B. 1
- C. 2
- D. 3
- E. More than 3
- F. I prefer not to answer

## APPENDIX G

### SAMPLE OF NEWSLETTER PUBLISHED





**2. Understand your high risk times.**

Anticipate your high-risk situations and plan for them. If you smoke with your morning coffee, plan to have your first coffee at work where you probably cannot smoke. Plan to keep busy in the beginning. Too much unstructured time is not a good thing when it comes to smoking cessation.

**3. Stock up on supplies.** Every smoker understands that smoking is also an oral addiction. When you quit smoking your brain will still crave the oral sensation of a cigarette. As part of your smoking cessation plan, stock up on oral substitutes like gum, raw vegetables, carrot sticks, hard candy, coffee stirrers, straws, etc.

**4. Pick a quit date.** A quit date is a personal commitment. It is important because it prepares your mind subconsciously. Pick a date within the next month. It doesn't have to be a special day.

**5. Let people know.** Quitting is easier with support. Choose people who you think will be helpful. Tell them your plan and how they can help. Also tell them how they cannot help.

**6. The First 2 Weeks.** The first two weeks are critical for your success. If you can get through the first two weeks, your chances of success is much higher. Therefore it is important to give yourself the best chance you can during these critical weeks. **STAY BUSY.**

**QUITLINE: 1-800-QUIT-NOW**

"Your life is in your hands, to make of it what you choose."



## LOCAL EVENTS

### **Susanville Symphony Society**

**Christmas Concert:** Dec. 20th at 7pm at the Assemblies of God Church. Tickets are available at Axia Home Loans and Margie's Book Nook. Call 530-310-8111 for more information.

### **Lassen Community College**

**Basketball:** LCC Men's Basketball vs. Lane Community College. Dec. 28th at 2pm at Lassen Community College.

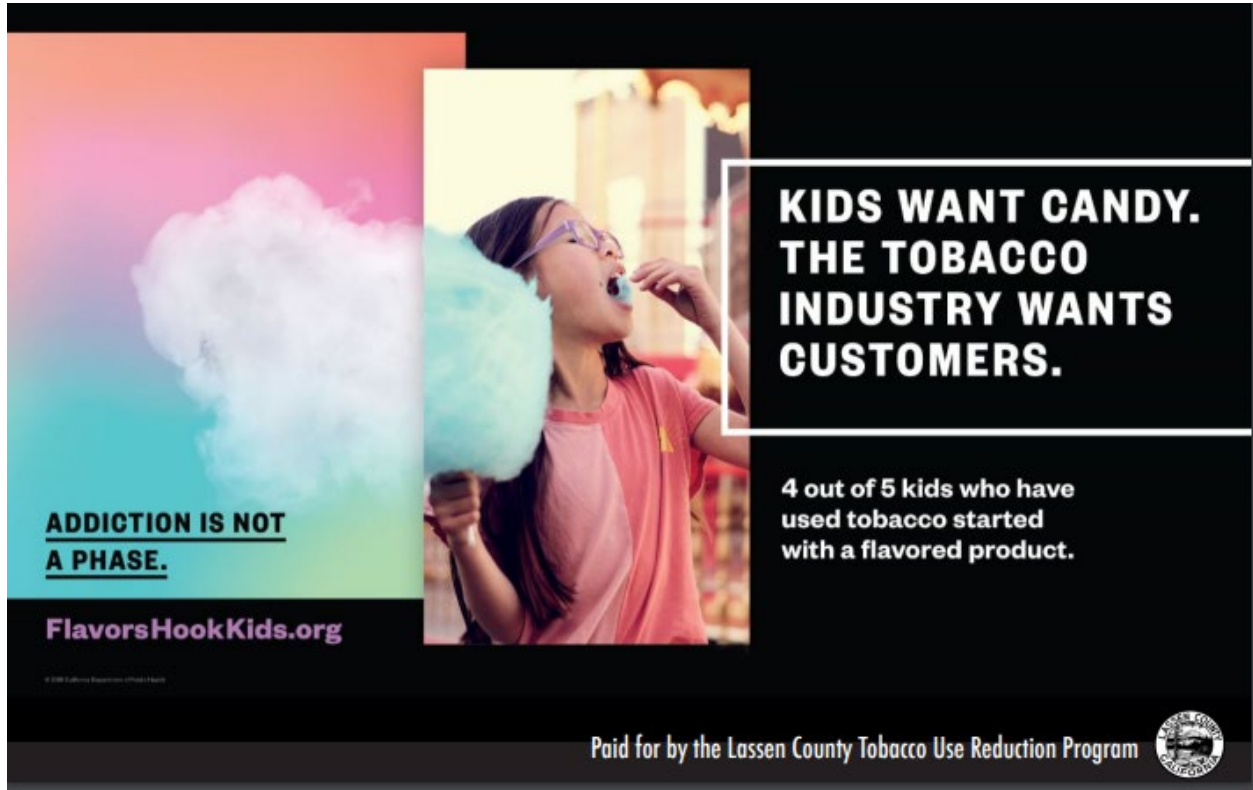
**Smoking Cessation classes:** Jan 6th, 13th, 20th and 27th @Northeastern Health Center. Call Debbie Jones for more information at 530-251-1490.

*"Christmas is, of course, the time to be home - in heart as well as body." - Garry Moore*



## APPENDIX H

### SAMPLE OF CTCP-CREATIVE AD



**ADDICTION IS NOT  
A PHASE.**

**FlavorsHookKids.org**

**KIDS WANT CANDY.  
THE TOBACCO  
INDUSTRY WANTS  
CUSTOMERS.**

4 out of 5 kids who have  
used tobacco started  
with a flavored product.

Paid for by the Lassen County Tobacco Use Reduction Program

