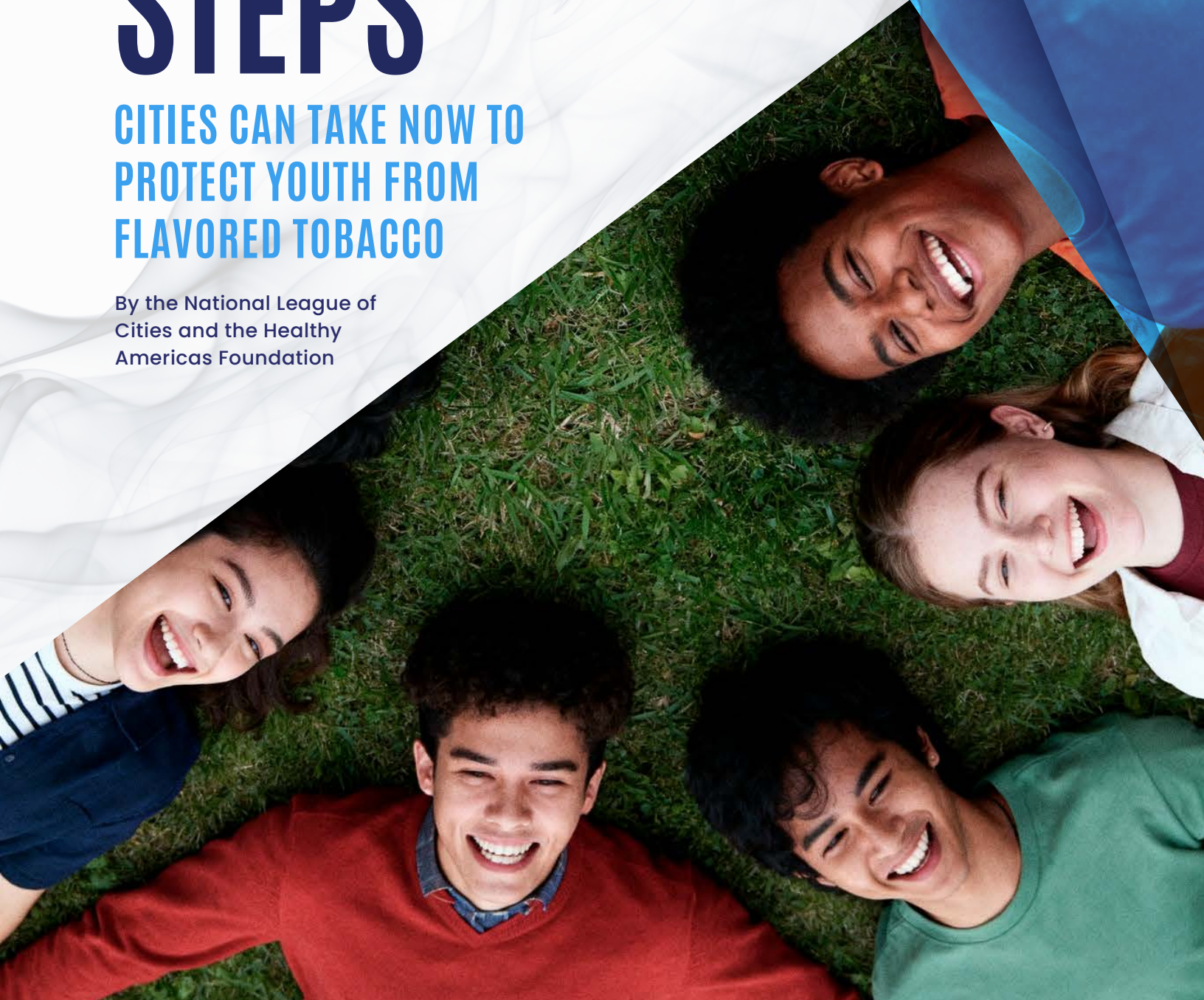


4

PRACTICAL STEPS

CITIES CAN TAKE NOW TO
PROTECT YOUTH FROM
FLAVORED TOBACCO

By the National League of
Cities and the Healthy
Americas Foundation



OVERVIEW

Advancing health and wellbeing means shaping the policies, systems, and environments that allow all young people to thrive. Protecting youth from flavored tobacco is a critical part of that work. Today, across the country, flavored nicotine products are driving youth addiction.

One in six
high school students
currently use **e cigarettes.**¹



With almost
nine in ten
reporting using **flavored products,**²
making flavors a primary driver of youth
nicotine addiction. Cities and towns have
the power and the tools to turn this around.

On May 5, 2026, the FDA authorized certain fruit-flavored e-cigarettes. Across multiple administrations federal bans on menthol cigarettes and flavored cigars remained stalled; however, local leaders need not wait. Cities can protect youth from nicotine addiction now by advancing proven local strategies.



¹Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data; YRBS Explorer, High School Students Who Currently Use Electronic Vapor Products. Available at: <https://yrbs-explorer.services.cdc.gov/#/>

²Park-Lee E, Jamal A, Cowan H, et. al. Notes from the Field: E-Cigarette and Nicotine Pouch Use Among Middle and High School Students – United States, 2024. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2024;73:774–778. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/73/wr/mm7335a3.htm>.

Below are four practical strategies to protect our youth from nicotine addiction that any city can adopt along with real world examples and clear first steps cities can take to get started.

Buffer Zones Around Schools and Youth Spaces



What it is: Policies that limit flavored tobacco sales within a set distance (e.g., 500 feet) of schools, parks, and other places where youth gather.



This approach reflects the reality that tobacco retailers are disproportionately concentrated in lower income neighborhoods and near schools. Chicago restricts the sale of flavored tobacco products, including menthol, within

500 feet of schools

to reduce youth exposure and access.

A 30-city study by the National Cancer Institute-funded ASPIRE Center found that retailer density is nearly **five times higher** in the lowest income neighborhoods, and **70% of city residents** live within a 10 minute walk of a tobacco retailer.³

GET STARTED:



Map tobacco retailers near schools, parks, and youth centers using a Geographic Information System (GIS).



Identify high-density areas where youth exposure is greatest.



Work with planning or legal staff to draft a buffer ordinance tied to zoning or public health authority.



Engage school leaders and parents early to build support and document local needs and priorities.



Learn more: [Chicago Municipal Code § 4-64-515](#).

³Tobacco retailers. ASPIRE Center. August 12, 2020. Available at: <https://aspirecenter.org/tobaccoretailers/>



Point-of-Sale Licensing and Retail Restrictions

What it is: Policies that require tobacco retailers to obtain a local license and comply with youth protective rules, such as product restrictions, spacing requirements, or price controls.

Licensing gives cities oversight, enforcement tools, and a way to gradually reduce retailer density. Philadelphia pairs licensing with strong retail caps, limiting permits to one per 1,000 residents by planning district and prohibiting new tobacco retailers within

500 feet
of K–12 schools,
reducing retail density and
protecting youth.



GET STARTED:



Inventory whether your city already licenses tobacco retailers – and if so, what authority that license provides.



Add or update license conditions to include youth-protective standards.



Use permit caps or establish spacing requirements to prevent further clustering.



Align enforcement across health and code departments to ensure consistency and fairness.



Learn more: [Philadelphia—Tobacco retailer permit eligibility & map.](#)



Comprehensive Bans on Flavored Tobacco Products

What it is: Policies that prohibit the sale of all flavored tobacco products, including menthol, without exemptions.

Comprehensive bans are associated with declines in youth use and overall tobacco sales. San Francisco’s comprehensive flavor ban led to

12% declines

in the use of flavored tobacco and e-cigarettes among 18–24 year olds.⁴



GET STARTED:



Assess state preemption rules to determine what authority your city has.



If full bans aren’t allowed, start with partial restrictions (e.g., flavored vapes or proximity-based bans.)



Engage legal counsel early to ensure the policy is enforceable.



Provide retailers with clear guidance and phase-in timelines.



Learn more: *San Francisco Health Code—Article 19Q: Prohibiting the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products.*

⁴Yang Y, Lindblom EN, Salloum RG, Ward KD. The impact of a comprehensive tobacco product flavor ban in San Francisco among young adults. *Addict Behav Rep.* 2020;11:100273. April 1, 2020. Available at: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7186365/>



Non-Punitive Smoke-Free School Policies

What it is: School policies that keep campuses tobacco and vape free while avoiding exclusionary discipline. The focus is education, cessation referrals, and supports rather than suspensions or citations that can widen educational gaps.



While cities don't control school districts, they play an important convening and partnership role. Duval County Public Schools in Jacksonville, FL uses an alternative-to-suspension approach for tobacco and vaping violations, connecting students to cessation resources instead of suspending them. The school district includes a tobacco education course in their district's middle and high school Code of Student Conduct handbook. Students who violate the district's tobacco-free campus policy are required to take the course at no cost.

GET STARTED:



Convene school leaders, local public health staff, and youth services to review existing policies.



Share model policies and cessation resources to replace punitive responses with referral-based approaches (e.g., counseling, cessation programs, or health education).



Identify local or state quitlines and youth cessation providers not yet partnered with schools.



Start with a pilot in one middle or high school before scaling district wide.



Learn more: [Case study on Duval County Public Schools' alternative-to-suspension approach.](#)

WHY LOCAL ACTION MATTERS NOW

The tobacco industry spends roughly

\$1 million
(per hour)

on retail promotions and discounts,⁵

concentrating marketing in communities with lower incomes and racial and ethnic communities.⁶ That's why policy—not just education—is essential.

More than

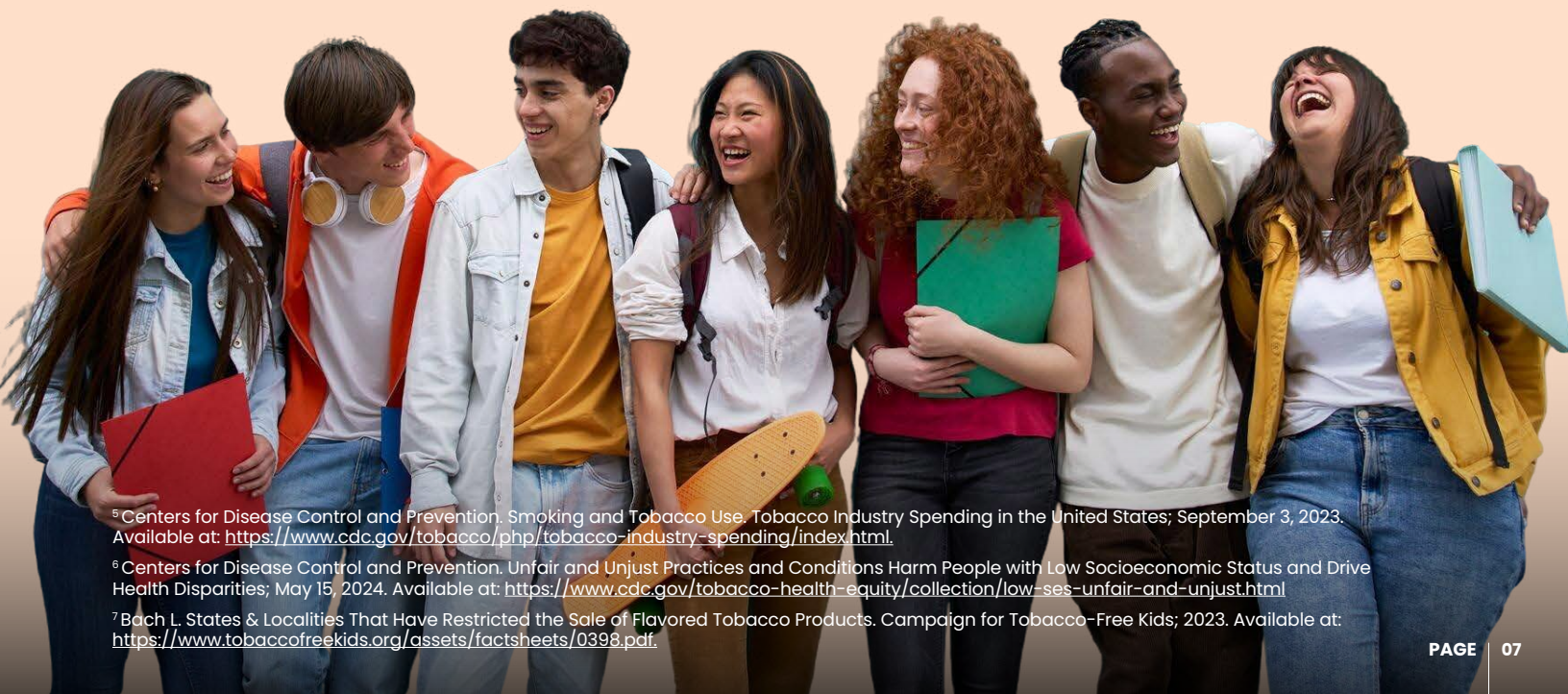
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localities

have already acted to restrict flavored tobacco sales.⁷

Cities that act now can protect youth, reduce inequities, and prevent long term health harms and lift the health and well being of all residents.

Local leaders already have a proven playbook. Whether you restrict sales near schools, license retailers, adopt a comprehensive ban, or partner with schools, each step reduces youth exposure and advances equity. **We invite city leaders to use the policy brief and resources below to move from awareness to action—now.**



⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Smoking and Tobacco Use. Tobacco Industry Spending in the United States; September 3, 2023. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/php/tobacco-industry-spending/index.html>.

⁶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Unfair and Unjust Practices and Conditions Harm People with Low Socioeconomic Status and Drive Health Disparities; May 15, 2024. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco-health-equity/collection/low-ses-unfair-and-unjust.html>

⁷ Bach L. States & Localities That Have Restricted the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products. Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids; 2023. Available at: <https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/assets/factsheets/03998.pdf>.

A Practical Roadmap for Cities

Equitable enforcement is key. Successful policies focus accountability on retailers, not youth, and avoid criminalization that can deepen community harm.

1

Map your retail landscape

Use GIS data to identify retailer density near schools and youth spaces.

2

Center families and communities from the start

Engage youth, parents, community-based organizations, and small retailers early to co-design solutions and address concerns about enforcement and economic impact.

3

Pair policy with cessation supports

- Promote resources like the bilingual

Su Familia Helpline

☎ 1-866-783-2645

Local Quitline Services

☎ 1-800-QUIT-NOW
(1-800-784-8669)

Local Quitline Services (Spanish)

☎ 1-855-DEJELO-YA
(1-855-665-3569)

- Support at ***smokefreeteen*** (www.teen.smokefree.gov)

4

Choose the right policy

Even in states with flavor ban preemption, cities can act through licensing, zoning, and school-based policies (see model policy language box).

CHOOSING POLICIES FOR YOUR CITY

Model Policy Language

State preemption does not ban local action. The tobacco industry has successfully used state preemption of local actions to restrict flavored tobacco sales, tax, and other strategies. However, if one policy avenue is off the table for your city because of state preemption, you can choose another effective policy approach.



Buffer Zones Prohibiting Flavored Product Sales Near Youth-Sensitive Areas

- [*Using Licensing and Zoning to Regulate Tobacco Retailers*](#)
- [*Model Comprehensive Tobacco Retailer Licensing Ordinance*](#)



Point-of-Sale Licensing and Restrictions

- [*Point-of-Sale Tobacco Licensing Playbook*](#)



Comprehensive Bans on Flavored Tobacco Products

- [*Restricting the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products Model Language*](#)
- [*Flavored Tobacco Sales Prohibitions, Enforcement Option*](#)



Non-Punitive Smoke-Free School Policies

- [*Commercial Tobacco-Free K-12 School Model Policy*](#)
- [*Vape Free Schools Tobacco Free Policy Toolkit*](#)

For more information and support in your efforts visit www.healthyamericasfund.org/4steps or contact the Healthy Americas Foundation at 4steps@healthyamericasfund.org