

Project Title: Opportunities and Barriers to Implementing Tobacco 21 in Vermont

Community Agency: American Lung Association

Abstract

Background: Tobacco is the leading cause of preventable death in the US and earlier age of tobacco use initiation is associated with lower rates of smoking cessation. The proposed Tobacco 21 (T21) bill would raise the minimum legal age of sales to 21.

Goal: Understand why T21 legislation has been unable to pass in Vermont.

Methods: We developed a 28-item LimeSurvey with qualitative and open-ended questions regarding demographics, personal smoking histories, and attitudes towards T21, which was then distributed to the 174 available Vermont legislators. In addition, we identified interview candidates with help from the ALA and conducted 6 interviews, which were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for common themes.

Results: 87.9% of respondents indicated that addressing tobacco use in Vermont is somewhat or very important, but only 62.1% of respondents indicated that they were either somewhat or strongly in favor of enacting T21 legislation. Commonly identified barriers to implementation included concerns that 18 is the age of majority for voting and military service, and concerns regarding individual agency versus personal responsibility. Opportunities for implementing T21 focused on the potential long-term healthcare savings and the similarities to Vermont legislation, which currently sets the sales age for marijuana, alcohol, and guns at 21.

Conclusion: While most legislators believe tobacco usage is an important problem worth addressing, a much smaller portion believe that T21 is an appropriate means to this end. By focusing on strategies to dismantle perceived barriers to T21 implementation, supporters of such legislation can better advocate for its passing.

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