

# Restricting Sales of Menthol Tobacco Products: Lessons Learned from Policy Passage and Implementation in Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Duluth, Minnesota

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# MN Menthol Evaluation Collaborators

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## Evaluation Workgroup



## Advisory Group



# Background

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In 2015, no U.S. cities had restricted menthol

**Minneapolis** and **St. Paul** had campaigns underway to restrict sales of flavored products (exempting menthol) to adult-only stores

**Duluth** moved forward with menthol and flavors at the same time

Case studies to capture the story and lessons learned from policy passage and implementation



# Background

## Policies passed in 2017 & 2018

- Restricted the sale of menthol, wintergreen, and mint products, including e-cigarettes, to adult-only stores

Intervention City	Exemptions	Policy Passage	Policy Implementation
<b>Minneapolis</b>	Tobacco shops Liquor stores	August 2017	August 2018
<b>Saint Paul</b>	Tobacco shops Liquor stores	November 2017	November 2018
<b>Duluth</b>	Tobacco shops	February 2018	June 2018



# Data Collection

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Purposive sample (n=50)

In-depth, in-person,  
semi-structured interviews:

- Elected officials
- Lead advocates
- Community members
- Other coalition members
- Public health staff
- City compliance staff

# Data Collection

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## **Two stages of interviews**

Following policy passage

During implementation



## **Document review**

Campaign materials

News stories

City Council proceedings

# Key Informant Interview Topics

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Experience and role in campaigns

Challenges and facilitators of policy passage

Opposition and resistance from retailers and industry

Implementation experiences and challenges

Unintended consequences



# Sample Questions from Interview Protocol

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Tell me a bit about how you became interested in the proposal to restrict menthol sales.

Tell me about how you participated in this effort.

Who was most supportive of a policy to restrict menthol?

What was the response of tobacco retailers?

How were you able to influence the City Council?

Was the policy passed as you originally hoped it would be? What was different, or had to change?



# Analysis

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Interviews were recorded and transcribed

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Analysis for themes, story, unique issues by city

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Member checks with MN Menthol Evaluation Advisory Group

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Incorporated feedback and drafted report

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Final review by key stakeholders from funding agencies and advocacy organizations

# Key Findings



# Respect Local Context

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“...[I] didn't think we had done enough work around **menthol education** to go forward with the policy at the same time that we did other flavors...the coalition decided we would work on other flavors and then we would do some education and community engagement around menthol, and then look at menthol a little later on.

“Because it came up during the flavor meetings, like ‘why don’t we just add menthol?’ And I just didn’t think it was a good idea because **we hadn’t done enough community engagement** around menthol.” *(Advocate)*

# “No Decision About us Without Us”

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Members of communities most impacted by menthol were visible campaign leaders

“The campaign was really being led by people of color that actually are most directly impacted by tobacco company targeting. And so, it was very easy for us to sign on and say, yeah, 100%, we support this.”

*(Advocate)*

# Importance of Community Engagement

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## Broad representation in outreach and testimony to Councils

- Youth
- Public health
- Faith leaders
- Medical providers
- Constituents



*Youth advocates provide powerful testimony at the St. Paul City Council hearings*

# Increasing Awareness

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“I think the fact that **we spent three years educating the community and engaging the community, especially those impacted, led to a very diverse coalition.** Right from the get-go, and I don’t think leaving menthol out was ever an option. Because that’s a big reason why so many of our coalition members were at the table.” *(Community member)*

“But I think, you know, when **they brought it forward as menthol it was an issue for people of color.** The African-American churches, NAACP, the African-American leadership council. You know, you just don't ignore that coalition when they come in and say, ‘This is killing our kids.’” *(Council member)*

# Emphasize “People over Profits”

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“I had a total display board which I had somebody hold up, which had my mother on there, a picture of the cigarettes she smoked. My late husband, a picture of the cigarettes he smoked. My mother's three sisters that all have died from cancer and a picture of the cigarettes they smoked.

And so, I started off by saying that [the retailers] said that the folks in the green shirts lost nothing. **Let me share with you what this Black woman lost.** And I told them to look at the poster. It was my mother, three aunts, and others ... too much to even put on there. And I just talked about how **historically Black folks have been used as guinea pigs, and they're continuing to do that.”**  
*(Community leader)*

# Anticipate and Counter Tobacco Industry Tactics

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“If I had any doubt that this policy would reduce nicotine addiction ... it was completely resolved by **the amount of money and effort the tobacco companies were spending to kill it.**” *(Coalition member)*



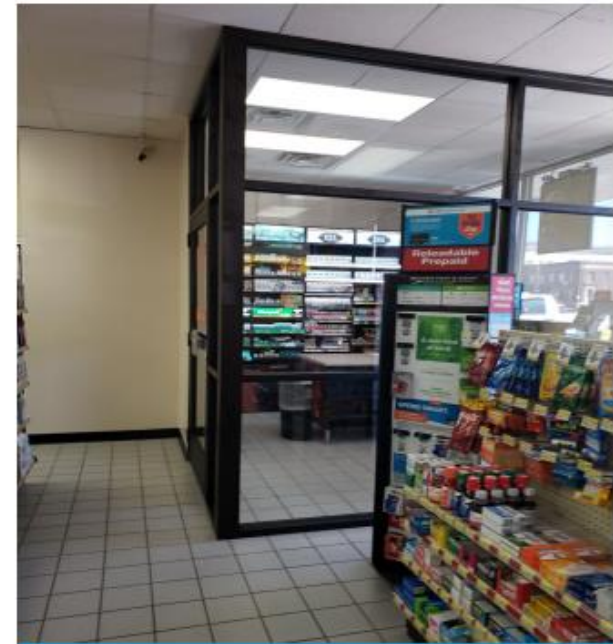
# Implementation Challenges

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“Store splitting” — Creating a tobacco products shop within a convenience store

Changing license from a convenience or grocery store to a tobacco product shop

Unsold products on hand



## Conclusion

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Despite challenges, number of stores selling menthol decreased substantially in all 3 cities

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Community support to limit access to menthol is strong

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City Councils are committed to reducing availability of menthol

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Greater awareness of the importance of eliminating menthol products to advance racial and health equity

# Dissemination of Case Study

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Report shared with interview participants and advisory group

Shared broadly with advocacy community to inform policy action

Lessons from implementation informed future local efforts:

- Closed liquor store exemption
- Distance requirement between retailers to counter “split stores”

Messaging is being used to advocate for statewide menthol policy

# Acknowledgements

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- The information does not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of Truth Initiative

The advocates in Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Duluth

# Resources

[Policy Process Case Study](#)

[Policy Implementation Case Study](#)

[Publication in Health Equity](#)

For additional information about ongoing policy efforts in Minnesota:

- Chris Matter
  - Sr. Program Manager | Community Health and Health Equity
  - Center for Prevention, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota
  - [Chris.Matter@bluecrossmn.com](mailto:Chris.Matter@bluecrossmn.com)