



September 2025



Dear Rural Partners,

We're settling back in to routine after a whirlwind of travel to the National Conference on Tobacco or Health in Chicago and the Tobacco Prevention University in Sacramento. (Whew!) It was great to see all we did at these important events and you'll read a bit about the Conference below AND we look forward to hearing from you all at this month's Rural Initiative's Workgroup about your experiences.

🔊🔊🔊 We're super excited to announce the rollout of our new **General Plan Public Comment Toolkit** with a training on Wednesday, October 1, 2025. (See below for details.)



Upcoming Events



The New General Plans Public Comment Toolkit: An Introduction and Walk-Through Training

In partnership with the Public Health Law Center, Sierra Club and the CTPP General Plans Community of Practice team, RISE is excited to announce our upcoming training on our new General Plans Public Comment Toolkit. The 90-minute training will walk participants through the new toolkit developed specifically with rural projects in mind (but can be useful for suburban and urban communities as well!).

Updates to a community's general plan are more than just a planning exercise—they're a chance to shape future development. For tobacco prevention projects and coalitions, these updates are a unique opportunity to make sure health and tobacco prevention related issues are included in the public's vision and discourse, which can be key to later policy adoption.

- If you're new to general plans, read [PHLC's General Plans and Tobacco Control in California](#) and visit CTPP's *General Plans* focus area in Partners. This will give you the background needed to follow along with the toolkit walk-through.
- Find out where your community is in its general plan update cycle. Is a general plan update underway? If so, which elements are being updated? What stage is your community in the process? Has a draft plan been released?

The toolkit will be released following the webinar and available on the RISE website and the General Plan Community of Practice page in Partners. For questions, contact [JoAnn Saccato](#).

Register Now



Rural Initiatives Workgroup (RIW)

Third Tuesday of the month

Tuesday, September 16, 2025

3:00 - 4:30 PM

Topics / Guests

2025 NCTOH / TPU

Look forward to hearing from you all!

Topic Ideas? Contact jsaccato@healthcollaborative.org

The Rural Initiatives Workgroup (RIW) is a monthly workgroup hosted by RISE for rural projects to learn, share information, network, celebrate wins, and brainstorm challenges. Invitation only. Contact [Shelly Brantley](#).



RISE Office Hours: Urban and Suburban Projects

Third Thursdays of the month

September 18, 2025

2:00 PM - 3:00 PM

[Zoom Link](#)

Meeting ID: 8763130 5788

Passcode: 374332

Phone in: 669-444-9171

Drop in office hours for urban and suburban projects working in rural jurisdictions.

Contact [JoAnn Saccato](#) to receive an Outlook calendar invite.



Rural Tobacco Cessation Discussion Group (Bimonthly)

First Monday of the month every other month

October 6, 2025

2:00 PM - 3:00 PM

[Zoom Link](#)

Meeting ID: 854 6565 2523

Passcode: 265859

Phone in: 669-444-9171

Informal discussion group hosted by RISE for all things cessation in our rural communities. Contact [JoAnn Saccato](#) for more information and with your topic ideas.



Deadline for Comments is September 15, 2025, 11:59 PM EST

The Food and Drug Administration is proposing a tobacco product standard that would regulate nicotine yield by establishing a maximum nicotine level in cigarettes and certain other combusted tobacco products. From their docket item:

“As we know, Each year, 480,000 people die prematurely from a smoking-attributed disease, making tobacco use the leading cause of preventable disease and death in the United States. Nearly all these adverse health effects are ultimately the result of addiction to the nicotine in combusted tobacco products, leading to repeated exposure to toxicants from those products.

“Nicotine is powerfully addictive. The U.S. Surgeon General has reported that almost 90 percent of adults who regularly smoke cigarettes start smoking by age 18. Because the majority of tobacco-related harms result from addiction that repeatedly exposes people to toxins from cigarettes and other combusted products, FDA is proposing this action to reduce the addictiveness of cigarettes and certain other combusted tobacco products, thus giving people who are addicted to these products and wish to quit the ability to do so more easily.

“This product standard would also help to prevent people who experiment with cigarettes and cigars (mainly youth) from developing addiction and progressing to regular use of combusted tobacco products as a result of that addiction. The proposed product standard is anticipated to benefit the population as a whole. It is also expected to reduce disparities associated with smoking, initiation, and cessation and to advance health equity.”

Rural News & Successes



2025 NCTOH Attracts 1,700 Registrants and an Optimistic Spirit

With the recent attack on public health efforts at the federal level, including the abrupt closing of the Office on Smoking and Health after 60 years of helping states across the nation with education, technical assistance, and standing up to the tobacco industry, presenters at the opening and closing plenaries of the 2025 NCTOH were fired up to not only continue the fight against Big Tobacco, but to regain what may be lost in the federal administration's decimation of vital public health infrastructure and initiatives.

"We're down, but not out!"

~Brian King, Executive Vice President of U.S. Programs Campaign, Tobacco-Free Kids

Brian King, former FDA Director of the Center for Tobacco Products (CTP), was a keynote speaker for the opening plenary and walked attendees through the history from the first [Surgeon General's Report on Smoking and Health](#) released in 1964 to the present day situation, reminding us along the way that all these efforts were fought by the industry and are still dependent on state and local actions for long term success.

"Change will only happen if we act boldly, decisively and remember that government only responds when citizens demand action and create the environment where inaction

The closing plenary focused on the most recent Surgeon General's report* and included a panel of its lead editors. For those that haven't read it yet, some of the main conclusions of the Surgeon General's Report were discussed by Pebbles Fagan, PhD, MPH, Professor, Fay Boozman College of Public Health:

1. Despite strong progress, **disparities in use persist** by race and ethnicity, income levels, education levels, sexual orientation, gender identity, occupation, **geography** and behavioral health status. Exposure to SHS remains disproportionately higher among Black people.
2. **Disparities are a social justice issue.** Reflection on the complex history of the commercialization of tobacco as well as past and present-day experiences of racism, discrimination and targeted marketing that have shaped the present are necessary.
3. **Social, structural, and commercial determinants of health** (such as persistent poverty and inequitable economic and social conditions) **lead to inequitable opportunities for living a life free from tobacco-related death and disease.**
4. **The tobacco industry has designed, engineered, and marketed** menthol cigarettes and other multi-sensory products that increase the likelihood of initiation, addiction and sustained use.
5. **The tobacco industry has targeted its products and marketing to specific vulnerable populations and use multiple tactics to undermine prevention and control efforts** [and enhance their corporate image.](#)
6. **Cigarette smoking remains a major cause of disease and death in America.** More than **490,000 deaths annually** are attributable to cigarette smoking and secondhand smoke exposure.
7. **Endgame efforts must include addressing the underlying determinants of health, including social, structural, commercial, and political drivers.**

Attendees were strongly encouraged to use and cite this report in community prevention work.

Efforts to further the work of the report were in discussion with the Surgeon General immediately following its release and have since been picked up thanks to funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Those efforts have resulted in a special edition of the Journal of the National Cancer Institute (JNCI). The [JNCI Monographs: Continued Impact of the Use of Commercial Tobacco Products on Health Disparities in the U.S.](#) is now available and includes the context and rise of commercial tobacco, a review of the legacy of colonization of tobacco, commercial drivers and channels and their impacts.

of any tobacco product and current use of any flavored tobacco product in young people.”

~Andrea Villanti, PhD, MPH, Professor, Deputy Director Rutgers Institute of Nicotine and Tobacco

The special issue also includes a vision and strategies to help address root causes and eliminate disparities, as well as a blue print for action in changing the paradigm for reducing those disparities. Of note is the need to include and tend to access to cessation with policy protections to prevent widening disparities.

In the ensuing panel discussion, Brenna VanFrank, MD, MSPH, who was the Senior Medical Officer at the Office on Smoking and Health until its closing, encouraged everyone to look outside the box for new partners to address the underlying determinants of health and to be sure to include cessation in all of those efforts.

In final comments, Dr. Fagan put a call out to rebuild ‘even better’ all that has been lost due to the present administration’s decimating actions towards decades of research, infrastructure, and prevention efforts.

**NOTE: With the loss of the Office on Smoking and Health, the infrastructure and foundational findings, documents and research may become lost and no longer protected for the people. We encourage you to download relevant reports and to remember, you can find the most recent recent Surgeon General’s report, [Eliminating Tobacco-Related Disease and Death: Addressing Disparities](#), on the RISE website on our Educational Materials Page.*

Regional Rural Featured at National Conference on Tobacco or Health (NCTOH)

**Implementing Healthy Retail
Initiatives as Commercial
Tobacco Prevention:
Environmental Change
Strategies from Northern
California and the Portland, OR
Area**

specialists in Trinity County, CA and Clackamas County, OR brought their experiences helping small, independently-owned convenience stores transition out of selling tobacco and into selling healthy food in hopes of offering a model to other rural communities throughout the nation. The model includes working with small town retailers as an ally working to ensure their long term success.

Research indicates that tobacco retailers can actually fare better financially with healthier food products than with commercial tobacco products. (See RISE's [Cigarettes and Flavored Tobacco Make No Cent\\$](#) fact sheet.)



Karen Compton, Tobacco Education Program Coordinator for the Human Response Network in Trinity County presenting at the 2025 NCTOH



Marc Czornij, Program Planner for Clackamas County Public Health presenting at the 2025 NCTOH.



Shelly Brantley, RISE Project Director, presenting at the 2025 NCTOH.

Approaches in Advocacy: Amplifying the Rural Voice

While rural communities experience disproportionately high rates of secondhand smoke exposure, they are less likely to be covered by policies that promote and protect health. RISE Project Director, Shelly Brantley, was one of three presenters sharing experience and resources used to address these disparities.

Cultural Adaptation in Tobacco Communication: Strategically Framing Tobacco Prevention for Rural Decision Makers

As tobacco prevention professionals working in rural communities, we know that many talking points associated with tobacco prevention policies may backfire with rural elected officials who believe freedom and personal choice outweigh any potential benefits of regulation.

Leaving us in a tough position, strategically framing our messages can help rural elected officials understand how local policy action can prevent tobacco use and lead to healthier communities.

This session explored RISE's [Framing Tobacco Control Policy for Rural Decision-makers: Best Practices to Guide Your Communications](#) developed with the help of California rural projects.



Shelly Brantley, RISE Project Director, presenting at the 2025 NCTOH.



Pre-Session: Tobacco Endgame Summit

The second U.S. Tobacco Endgame Summit sponsored by Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) featured numerous panels and breakout sessions that included national and international presenters all working to end an “industry-produced epidemic.” There was a strong thread of support for cessation, seeing it as a mutually reinforcing strategy to go along with policy changes to reach Endgame goals.

Eduardo Bianco, Director of the Addiction Training Program for Health Professionals at NextGenU, noted that Endgame goals will be more difficult to achieve without cessation. Presenting on behalf of [Nicotine Addiction and Tobacco Use Treatment Initiative \(NATTI\)](#), the global effort aimed at enhancing the capacity of health professionals and their organizations to address tobacco and nicotine dependence through evidence-based education, policy advocacy, and collaborative networks, noted that strong laws increase quit attempts, which drives demand for cessation services.



Breakout sessions including assessing the current legal landscape, noting California's successes, and working in those tough-to-crack areas.

Want your project or community's work featured in a future issue of RISE News?

Contact [JoAnn](#).

Rural Resources & Info

2025 Facts & Figures Released

With the intention of "Empower Californians who use tobacco to quit, and vigorously counter industry strategies aimed at retaining current customers or addicting replacement customers," the California Department of Public Health has released its updated

California Tobacco Facts and Figures 2025

August 2025

Also interesting to note is that in 2024, most California youths aged 12 to 17 years old supported statements calling for the sale of flavored tobacco products to end (77.9 percent) and the sale of menthol cigarettes to end (77.1 percent). This may speak to the success of educational efforts by local tobacco prevention projects.

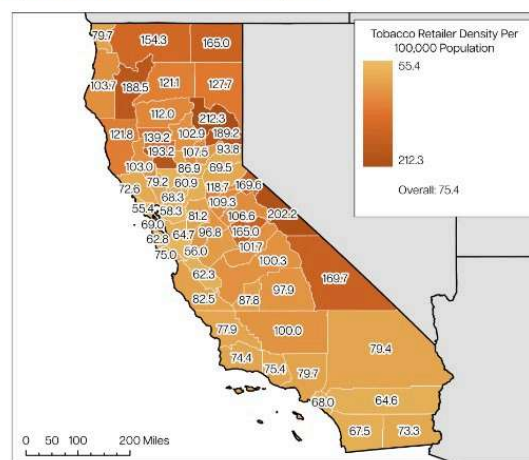
Retailer density per capita shows higher in most rural counties. (See map image, right.) As well, the most common places to see tobacco and vape product advertising were at gas stations or convenience stores.

rates of use growing among the youth population.

Over 400,000 out of the 3.3 million California tobacco users (over 12%) live in rural areas, as of 2022-23.

The report reveals that most California adults agreed that flavored tobacco products are intentionally designed to appeal to youth (82.7 percent) and that the sale of flavored tobacco should not be allowed (68.4 percent).

Figure 26. Tobacco Retailer Density Per 100,000 Population, by County—California
Department of Tax and Fee Administration, 2023



Source: California Department of Public Health. California Tobacco Prevention Program. Analysis of California Department of Tax and Fee Administration List of Tobacco Retail Licensees as of September 2023. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Public Health; January 2025.

Access the Full Report

Cessation

In a 2024 report, HHS released a framework to advance smoking cessation that includes six goals: reducing disparities, increasing knowledge, strengthening and sustaining cessation services, increasing access and coverage of treatment, advancing and sustaining surveillance and strengthening evaluation, and promoting research.



HHS Framework to Support and Accelerate Smoking Cessation 2024

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is taking action to support and accelerate smoking cessation and reduce smoking- and cessation-related disparities.¹ Cigarette smoking remains the leading cause of preventable disease, disability, and premature death in the United States, including about 25% of all cardiovascular disease deaths and 30% of all cancer deaths.² Cigarette smoking also contributes significantly to persistent health disparities among population groups that have systematically experienced social, economic, or environmental disadvantages.² The *HHS Framework to Support and Accelerate Smoking Cessation* uses a health equity lens to provide an organizing set of goals and broad strategies intended to enhance collaboration and coordination to drive further progress in increasing smoking cessation. It will be used by HHS to enhance efforts to support smoking cessation and provide direction for coordinated efforts with others from multiple sectors to advance collective efforts to improve the nation's health.

The Framework focuses specifically on supporting and accelerating the cessation of combusted tobacco products—namely, cigarettes, cigars, little cigars, and cigarillos—for people of all ages across the lifespan. Briefly, the six goals of the Framework (see page 11) focus on reducing disparities, increasing knowledge, strengthening and sustaining cessation services, increasing access to and coverage of cessation treatment, advancing and sustaining surveillance and strengthening evaluation, and promoting research. These goals, and the broad strategies associated with them (see page 12), are underpinned by four cross-cutting principles: advancing health equity; community engagement; coordination, collaboration, and integration; and evidence-based approaches (see page 8). These principles serve as a lens to guide the implementation of the Framework goals and strategies.

[Background](#)

Access the Framework



Tips for Finding & Engaging Supportive Retailers



The movement to further restrict the sale of tobacco products will continue to pit tobacco prevention advocates and organized tobacco retailer associations against one another. Clearly, the tobacco industry will continue to oppose restrictions on their products, but it may be the organized retail associations and their lobbyists that are the most formidable adversaries in advancing local policies to further restrict or eliminate tobacco sales altogether. However, there may be some retailers that support (or wouldn't oppose) further tobacco sales restrictions. Having a supportive or friendly retailer would be a very important voice in any retail tobacco campaign. Finding those retailers will require work and be a bit tricky given their natural opposition to retail tobacco policies. This guidance document is designed to help local tobacco prevention advocates find supportive tobacco retailers.

Assessing the Landscape and Planning Your Approach
Utilize your coalition members' connections to identify which retailers would be most receptive to further communication. Also consider community members and leaders that can also help you identify retailers that would be willing to say positive things. Remember that locally owned establishments, over corporate-owned ones, may have greater autonomy over decisions to support your coalition's efforts.

Think about these 3 suggested levels of engagement of a potentially supportive retailer:

Engaging Local Retailers

At this year's NCTOH, Karen Compton, Tobacco Education Program Coordinator for the Human Response Network in Trinity County and RISE Advisory Committee member, presented on her experience with engaging with local retailers to help them transition from tobacco products to healthy food options. If that seems like a strategy your project or coalition is interested in pursuing, you may appreciate this 2024 Tips sheet developed by the California Tobacco Endgame Center for Organizing and Engagement.

Access Resource

Study Reveals Nicotine Pouch Use Among Adults is Rare

A new study co-led by the Keck School of Medicine of USC (School) found the prevalence of nicotine pouch use was low

2022.

In an article released by the School highlighting the research, it was noted that, “The majority of adults currently using pouches also currently smoke cigarettes. Additionally, 5.2% of those who attempted to quit smoking in the past year and had relapsed back to smoking reported using pouches to help with their cessation efforts.”

[Read the Study](#)[Read the Article](#)

On Demand Smoking Cessation and Reduction in Pregnancy Training Available

This evidence-based training offered by the Society for Public Health Education (SOPHE) includes interviewing techniques to guide behavior change and apply real-world tools for use in clinical, public health, and home visit settings.

Trending Tidbits



Keep up the great work! We're here with you!



Reminder: RISE is Here to Help!

Need help building your work plan? Reporting? Learning how to engage with community? RISE is here to help with these topics and more. Email [JoAnn](#) or [Shelly](#) for technical assistance or submit a request using the link below...

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