

# Development, implementation, and use of a policy survey of local leaders in Vermont



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Local leaders in Vermont were surveyed to assess their opinion on tobacco control policies. The policies with most support were **preventing retailers from accepting coupons & increasing the tobacco excise tax**. Many respondents were neutral about tobacco policy options, suggesting a **need for further education & an opportunity to garner more policy support at the local level**.

To read more, you can find the full report here



## Introduction

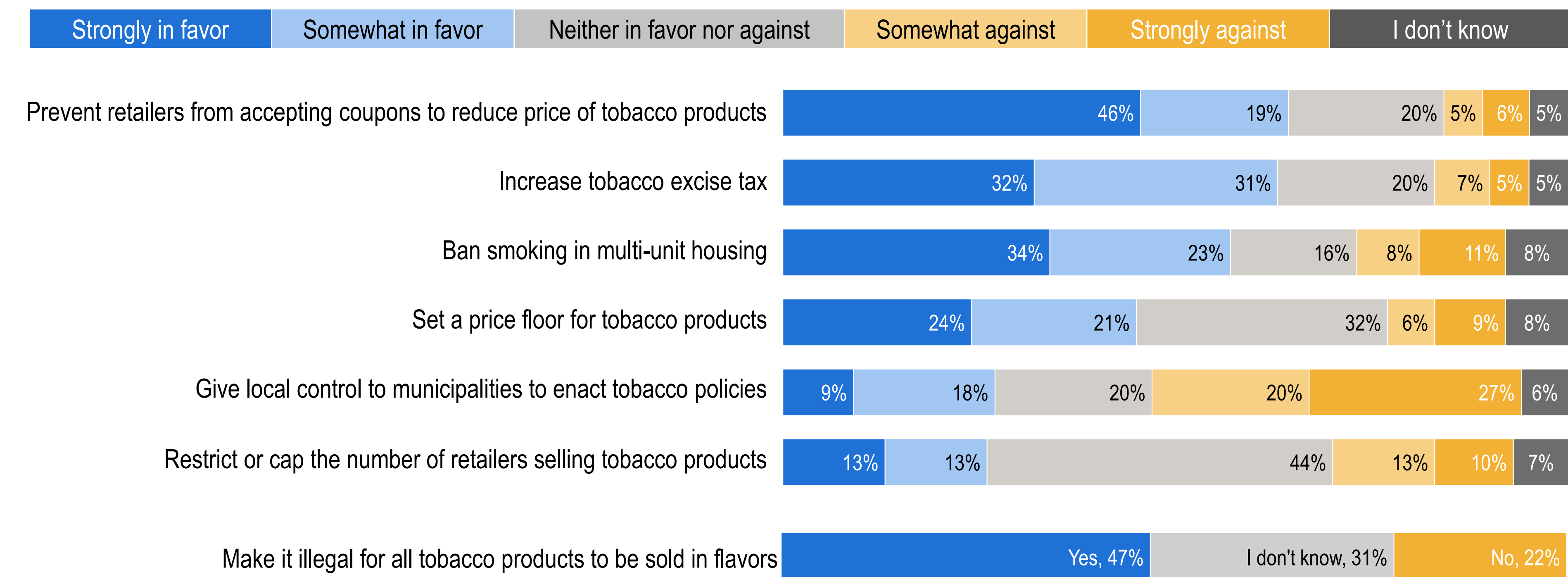
- The 2021 Vermont Local Opinion Leader Survey collected data on the opinions of local leaders in Vermont regarding substance use prevention policies for tobacco, alcohol, and cannabis. This is the third iteration of a survey that was also conducted in 2014 and 2017.
- The survey was a collaborative effort between the Tobacco Control Program and the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program within the Vermont Department of Health (VDH).
- The study was conducted to:
  - Help VDH and partners understand which policies have broader support and which health problems are facing local communities.
  - Inform local discussions and decision-making on substance use prevention and control strategies and policies.
  - Equip VDH and partners with information about common arguments for or against different policy options, which can aid in education and policy promotion efforts.

## Methods

- Local leaders holding seven roles were exhaustively sampled Oct-Nov 2021:
  - Municipal: Mayor, Selectboard Chair, Town Manager
  - Planning: Regional Planning Commission Executive Director, Local Planning Commission Chair
  - Business: VT Chamber of Commerce Staff and Board Members
- 356 of 593 (60%) completed the survey either online or over the phone.

## Results

### Support for different tobacco policies varied



### Reasons behind support or lack of support for select policies

	Reasons for	Reasons against
<b>Ban smoking in multi-unit housing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Protect neighbors from the negative health effects and unpleasant smell of secondhand smoke</li> <li>Reduce risk of fire and damage to property</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Too restrictive, prefer a ban in only indoor or shared spaces</li> <li>Challenging to enforce</li> <li>Government overreach</li> <li>Disproportionately impacts people with low incomes, creates barriers for people to obtain stable housing</li> </ul>
<b>Make it illegal for all tobacco products to be sold in flavors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flavors appeal to youth</li> <li>Potential for long-term addiction with earlier initiation</li> <li>Flavors minimize perception of harm among youth</li> <li>Tobacco should not be made to look appealing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Against any type of government regulation of tobacco</li> <li>Runs counter to the free market and restricts individual choice</li> <li>Would be better to rely on an education campaign rather than a ban on flavors</li> </ul>
<b>Set a price floor so that tobacco products could not be sold below a certain price</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discourage tobacco use</li> <li>Reduce harm to tobacco users</li> <li>Reduce secondhand smoke and costs to the healthcare system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Free market should dictate prices</li> <li>Price floors punish businesses</li> <li>Disproportionately impacts tobacco users with low income</li> <li>People will buy tobacco from nearby states or substitute other drugs</li> </ul>
<b>Give local control to municipalities to enact tobacco control policies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Always support opportunities for greater local control</li> <li>Local governments know the needs of their community best</li> <li>Caveat: only want to let towns enact more or stricter regulation on top of state policies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local governments don't have capacity to implement or enforce new policies</li> <li>It is the state's responsibility to regulate tobacco</li> <li>Tobacco laws that differ from town to town would be ineffective and confusing</li> </ul>

## Key takeaways

- For nearly all policies included in the survey, 20% or more respondents were neutral, suggesting an opportunity to educate around the importance of tobacco control policies and broaden the base of support.
- Common reasons for policy support or opposition can be used to tailor education and outreach efforts by VDH and partners at the local level.