

California Executes Rapid Evaluation of Tobacco 21 Law

In June 2016, California became one of the first states to implement a law raising the tobacco sales age to 21. The state assessed the law's implementation and found broad awareness of and support for the law among both tobacco retailers and youth.

In May 2016, the California Legislature passed [SBX2 7](#) (also known as Tobacco 21, or T21) which raises the minimum age for purchasing tobacco from 18 to 21. The law went into effect on June 9, 2016, and it covers all individuals in California except active duty military personnel aged 18 and older and American Indian tribal lands. The California Department of Public Health's California Tobacco Control Program (CTCP) measured retailer and public support, retailer compliance, and exposure to the T21 informational campaign, hoping that this data would help illustrate California's success in implementing T21. CTCP found that most retailers were aware of the law and supported it, there was significant reduction of illegal sales to youth under 18, and that young adults agreed that T21 would reduce youth tobacco use. CTCP developed a logic model as part of its process to evaluate the effectiveness of the T21 law, and the evaluation data was [published](#) in *Tobacco Control*.

Steps Taken:

- CTCP launched an information campaign to raise awareness and facilitate implementation of the law. The campaign used a multipronged approach, including a website portal to rapidly disseminate multi-lingual information, a press conference, a tobacco retailer educational toolkit, paid advertisements, and social media posts.
- CTCP started its evaluation process by drafting a logic model, which delineated program inputs and activities along with the expected outputs. Short-term outcomes from the logic model informed CTCP's decision to poll tobacco retailers to investigate the awareness of, support for, and implementation of California's T21 law. Outcomes also led CTCP to inspect tobacco retailers' compliance and associated barriers with compliance.
- CTCP contracted with California State University in Sacramento to conduct surveys measuring T21's implementation. This work included The California Tobacco Retailer Poll, which is a telephone survey conducted in English and Spanish. The tobacco purchase surveys assessed compliance rates. CTCP also disseminated an online survey to assess the general public's attitudes and tobacco use behaviors in light of T21.
- CTCP published the results of this evaluation in an article in the *Tobacco Control* journal.

- Almost all the retailers surveyed (98.6%) were aware of T21, and most (60.6%) supported it.
- Most young adults surveyed (61.7%) agreed that raising the minimum age reduces youth tobacco use.
- After the law was implemented, tobacco purchase surveys revealed a significant decline in illegal tobacco sales among teenagers aged 15-16.

Results:

CTCP administered a survey to California's tobacco retailers. The survey generated several findingsⁱ, outlined below:

- 98.6 percent of retailers were aware of the T21 law and 60.6 percent of retailers supported it.
- 84 percent of retailers agreed that it was easy to adhere to the T21 law, and 90.7 percent of retailers believed that it was easy to train staff to adhere to T21.
- 63.6 percent of young adults aged 18-24 were aware of the law, and 61.6 percent agreed that raising the tobacco purchase age would cut down on youth access to tobacco products.
- The retailer violation rate (RVR) using youth decoys under age 18 decreased following T21, from 10.3 percent to 5.7 percent. Furthermore, the RVR using young adult decoys aged 18-19 was 14.2 percent for traditional tobacco and 13.1 percent for electronic smoking devices.

Lessons Learned:

- Because T21 passed so quickly and unexpectedly, there was no time to collect baseline data before the law was implemented.
- Most of California's tobacco retailers and young adults support the T21 law and the vast majority of retailers are aware of the policy change.
- Collaboration among various levels of tobacco control is imperative to creating an adequate evaluation measure. CTCP's evaluation task force members assisted with both the study design and the development of survey instrument.
- Starting the evaluation process with a logic model was an essential first step to determining which outcomes need to be measured, and which stakeholders (e.g., tobacco retailers, 18-21-year-old tobacco consumers, and youth tobacco consumers) needed to be surveyed as part of the evaluation process.
- California's tobacco purchase survey among teens aged 15-16 years old reinforced that T21 is a promising strategy for reducing youth access to tobacco products, as there was a significant decline in illegal tobacco sales to teens 15-16 years old.
- Evaluating this law and other tobacco control laws requires adequate funding and staff to disseminate survey instruments and analyze data findings.

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ⁱThese results were collected by July 2017, only one year after T21 became law. Therefore, CTCP only had short-term data available for its evaluation and did not have data available regarding tobacco use data among California teens after T21's implementation.