



Vadnais Heights passes comprehensive restrictions on flavored tobacco

Vadnais Heights became the 12th Minnesota city to end the sale of flavored tobacco products in November. The ordinance, which will go into effect January 6, 2026, prohibits the sale of all flavored tobacco products, including menthol, fruit, and candy flavors. The ordinance capped the total number of tobacco licenses at six, increased penalties for tobacco shops which violate the ordinance, and removed penalties on youth for attempted purchase, use and possession.

At the public hearing, city council members heard from students and advocates. “The lives of our youth and the future of our community are worth far more



ANSR staff and supports at Vadnais Heights City Council

than any profit margin,” said Ramsey County Student Action Team member Mason Schultz. Princeton Vang, another Ramsey County Student Action Team member said, “I have been educating my peers at school and in the community about the harms of tobacco. Youth continue to be targeted by these products, and we must prevent this.”

The need is critical for broad state and federal level policies that restrict the sale of menthol and flavored tobacco. Unfortunately, movement on federal menthol restrictions has largely stalled in the last few years. At the state level, ANSR’s advocacy on addressing menthol and flavors continues, but in the midst of uncertainty and gridlock in this year’s legislative session, action on a flavor policy at the state level is not expected. This makes local advocacy, like that in Vadnais Heights, all the more important.

ANSR President, Jeanne Weigum, emphasized to the Vadnais Heights city council members, “You can help solve this problem. Don’t count on the FDA, don’t count on the attorney general, and don’t count on the legislature to do what you can do.” Molly Schmidtke, ANSR’s Policy and Technical Assistance Manager, said, “Vadnais Heights is doing the right thing for their community. Commercial tobacco control cannot wait for the FDA. We need to

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take the fight to each community individually to ensure that we are protecting our kids and the community as a whole.”

Schmidtke continued, “Restricting the sale of all flavored commercial tobacco products saves lives. Smoking remains as the leading cause of preventable disease and death in the United States, and Big Tobacco is still targeting Black, LGBTQIA+, American Indians and young people; it’s time to put a stop to it.” Students and advocates in Vadnais Heights asked for change, “We can’t let an industry make money off of young people like me and my peers, and I don’t want to see any more of my peers and loved ones addicted to tobacco products, and this law can help change that. I will continue to advocate for change in my school and community, and I need your help in making that change.” said Vang.

By unanimously passing this ordinance, Vadnais Heights City Council set clear intentions to protect their community from the harms of flavored tobacco. City Council Member Steve Rogers said, “I can’t go to sleep at night if I were to turn this down. Our job is to protect the residents of the city.”

Thank you to everyone who emailed, called, testified, sent a letter of support, attended a council meeting, or spread the word about this ordinance. Your voice matters in creating important public health policy change!



2025 Legislative Preview

With all the uncertainty surrounding the session, Minnesotans for a Smoke-Free Generation has opted to take a year off from pushing a specific bill. Instead, the coalition will spend the session communicating with lawmakers about the negative impact commercial tobacco has on our communities and offering solutions for future sessions. There will be many opportunities to make your voice heard on this still-important topic. Stay tuned for details!



Members of the MSFG coalition on the way to 2024 Day at the Capitol

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ANSR Staff Presented at, Attended, and Hosted Several Conferences this Fall

The **APHA conference** is the oldest and largest public health conference in the world. APHA's mission is to improve public health and health equity through advocacy, policy, and capacity building. ANSR staff learned about the national landscape of commercial tobacco policies and programs, and gained insight on the intersection with other areas of public health. We were honored to have our ANSR staff member, Molly Schmidtke, present a poster titled, "What Influences Local Policy Makers to End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco?"



The **Advocating for Equity Where We Live, Work, and Play Summit** was hosted by the Society for Public Health Education (SOPHE) in Washington, D.C. October 19-21, 2024. The conference was organized by SOPHE and a coalition of public health and advocacy professionals and focused on public health education and advocacy at local, state, and national levels. ANSR staff member Molly Schmidtke presented a session titled "Advocacy into Action: Changing the Local and State Landscape of Commercial Tobacco Control".

The American Nonsmokers' Rights Foundation hosted the 2024 **Clearing the Air Institute** in Philadelphia. Staff from ANSR's Live Smoke Free Program joined others from around the country to learn and participate in conversations around smokefree air protections and gaps, smoke-free housing, and secondhand smoke exposures.



Top: from left: Alex Eberhart, Katie Engman, Jaclyn Frank and Molly Schmidtke at APHA

Middle: Molly Schmidtke at SOPHE

Below: Nicki Linsten-Lodge, Sheila Watercott and Sara Pundsack at SBHC

The annual **School Behavioral Health Conference (SBHC)** brings together various collaborating partners to offer evidence based resources, tools, community, practice, and support. ANSR's ATOD Regional Prevention coordinators attended this conference, and Nicki Linston-Lodge, Sara Pundsack and Sheila Watercott (ANSR) presented a session titled, "Primary Prevention: Uncovering the Good that Exists in Minnesota."

Left: Jackie Siewart, Alex Eberhart and Jaclyn Frank at Clearing the Air

Right: Molly Schmidtke and Kenndy Montgomery hosting ANSR Exhibit table at MN Prevention Program Sharing Conference



MPRC Hosts the 50th annual MN Prevention Program Sharing Conference

The MN Prevention Program Sharing Conference celebrated its 50th anniversary in October. This year's conference in St. Cloud, MN had a historic high of 287 attendees. ANSR staff led conference planning, presented four breakout sessions, and hosted an exhibit booth. Nancy Riestenberg and Sheletta Brundidge energized conference attendees with keynote speeches covering the history and future of prevention in Minnesota. John Noltner of *A Peace of My Mind* hosted the closing keynote, presenting work from his multimedia arts project that uses portraits and personal stories to bridge divides and encourage dialogue on important issues. *A Peace of My Mind* hosted an exhibit and photo studio allowing participants to reflect on the question "what inspires hope in your prevention work?"

This year's conference also included a musical performance celebrating a collaboration between Thomas X and the Step Up Deer River Program, a Drug Free Communities Grantee out of Deer River Public Schools.

A new youth track provided opportunities for student attendees to engage with and reflect on conference content. Several youth presented breakout sessions on their work in school-based coalitions and projects.

The MN Prevention Achievement Award was formally announced at this year's conference. This new award honors individuals or groups who make outstanding contributions to substance misuse prevention efforts in Minnesota will be announced annually. To learn more or make a nomination go to mnpirc.org/prevention-achievement.

Save the date for next year's conference on October 14-15, 2025 in Duluth.



ANSR staff at 2024 MN Prevention Program Sharing Conference

Arden Hills Votes 'Yes' on Policy Change

Arden Hills updated its commercial tobacco ordinance in September, capping the number of licenses issued in the city, prohibiting the issuance of a tobacco license to a stand-alone tobacco shop, and increasing fees for tobacco shops that violate the ordinance. The Arden Hills tobacco ordinance already included comprehensive restrictions on flavored tobacco products, including menthol.

The ordinance changes protect Arden Hills citizens from tobacco industry targeting, reduce the appeal of commercial tobacco products, and support those who are trying to quit smoking or vaping. We applaud the Council for passing this ordinance and putting their residents' health above industry profits. Thank you to everyone who emailed, called, testified, sent a letter of support, attended a council meeting, or spread the word about this ordinance. Your voice matters in creating important public health policy change!



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New Art Installation



Don't Discount My Life Jacket (D.D. Jacket)

Katrina and Catrielle Barnett 2024

Over a thousand mailer coupons from tobacco companies, fabric, thread, fishing line, neoprene, interfacing zip ties, grommets, zipper

The tobacco industry continues to sell death at a discount. ANSR collaborated with artists Katrina and Catrielle Barnett to show the impact of these discounts.

The recently completed art installation is a wearable garment adorned with more than 1,000 tobacco industry mailers and coupons. The artists' intention was to create a somber piece, reminiscent of the grim reaper. The weight of the thirty-five pound garment is both physical and visual. The hood completely conceals the face of the person wearing it, as if the tobacco ads have completely taken over their body.

The artists were shocked and appalled at the attractiveness of the materials used in tobacco industry coupon mailings, and the goal of this piece is for viewers to think, "Are you kidding me?!"

Look for the garment to be displayed at upcoming conferences and events around Minnesota.