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Survey finds tobacco and alcohol more available than milk and fresh fruit

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New research shows only about 32 percent of stores in Colusa County sell fresh fruits and vegetables, but more than 85 percent sell flavored tobacco products. These findings are part of new research released today on the availability and marketing of tobacco products, alcohol, condoms, and healthy and unhealthy food options in California stores that sell tobacco.

Today, throughout California, health advocates held 13 press events to release results of the scientific survey, which is the largest its kind. It builds upon initial research released three years ago in March 2014 and provides insights into changes in the availability and marketing of the studied products during this time. Information was collected in the summer of 2016 from more than 7,100 stores in all 58 California counties including pharmacies, supermarkets, delis, convenience and liquor stores, as well as tobacco-only stores.

"Overall, the findings show a continuing and alarming discrepancy in our county in the accessibility and marketing between products that promote a healthy lifestyle, and those that don't," said Amanda Pitts, Colusa County Public Health. "Stores play an important role on our community's health, and this survey shows offerings and messaging are out of balance, tipping heavily toward unhealthy options. Our goal is to help re-calibrate the balance toward health."

The survey found the following for Colusa County:

- In addition to selling cigarettes, 79 percent of stores sell "little cigars" or cigarillos, but only 32 percent of stores sold fresh fruits or vegetables.
- Only 18 percent of stores sold non- or low-fat milk, but 82 percent sell alcohol.
- E-cigarettes saw a significant increase in Colusa County in stores from the last time this survey was conducted, up more than 9 percent.

"The expanded availability of e-cigarettes are of particular concern and reflect the spike in use by teens and young adults in the last three years," said Dr. Gregory Burt, Colusa County Health Officer.

Another goal was to examine the accessibility and marketing of healthy and unhealthy products to youth.

"This survey found that our community's youth are inundated with unhealthy messages and choices. We need to change what information and options our kids are exposed to and work to surround them with healthy choices and messaging instead," said Santana King, Colusa County Public Health.

Additional survey findings for Colusa County:

- Only 7 percent of stores advertised healthy products on their storefronts, but 79 percent of storefronts advertised unhealthy products.
- More than 32 percent of stores place tobacco products or ads in kid-friendly locations, such as tobacco ads at "kid-level" (three feet or below) or tobacco products near candy or toys.
- 86 percent of stores sell flavored non-cigarette tobacco products, which often have kid-appealing flavors, such as grape, watermelon, chocolate, gummy candies and even breakfast cereals.

Tobacco use in Colusa County continues to be a matter of concern with both the adult smoking rate and youth tobacco use rate falling above the state average. According to the California Health Interview Survey and the California Student Tobacco Survey, the adult smoking rate in Colusa County is 16.6 percent compared to the statewide rate of 12.7 percent and youth tobacco use rate is 22.7 percent compared to the statewide rate of 13.8 percent (California Health Survey, 2012-2014; California Student Tobacco Survey, 2016).

Colusa County Public Health is committed to continuing to work with local health advocates and partners to provide accurate information and help make the healthy choice the easy choice for Californians.

Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community is a statewide campaign formed by tobacco prevention, nutrition, alcohol abuse prevention, and STD prevention partners collaborating to improve the health of Californians by informing them about the impact of unhealthy product availability and marketing in the retail environment.

For state and county-specific data and more information on Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community, please visit www.healthystoreshealthycommunity.com.

About the Author

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About Lloyd Green Jr, Editor

Is the Owner, Publisher, Editor, and Reporter of the Williams Pioneer Review. Committed to publishing the news of our Community, Lloyd has been the owner of the Williams Pioneer Review since 2010. To contact Lloyd about this article or future articles, please email him at lloyd@colusacountynews.net

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