

Telling Missouri's Public Health Stories



Leadership from Chief Health Strategist Achieves Public Health Win

In the United States, 96% of current tobacco users began smoking or using other tobacco products before the age of 21. This startling statistic—and many others—lead Springfield City Council to pass legislation which sets the minimum legal sales age for tobacco and vape products at 21—nationally called Tobacco 21.

National estimates from the Institutes of Medicine predict a 25% decrease of smoking in 15-17 year-olds and a 15% decrease in 18-20 year-olds as a result of Tobacco 21 implementation. That would save an estimated 223,000 people born between 2000 and 2019 from premature death from tobacco use.

Springfield joins more than 475 cities and counties in 29 states to implement Tobacco 21 (more than 20 of those in Missouri), but local health leaders were unsure whether this could pass in Springfield. The Springfield-Greene County Health Department, working as the Chief Health Strategist, aligned partners and collected extensive data well ahead of a formal proposal to the city council. Staff with the Health Department worked with Springfield's Healthy Living Alliance to raise awareness of the Tobacco 21 policy model, examples of successes in other communities, and the reality of the worsening statistics around smoking—especially considering the alarming trend of vaping in youth—in Springfield and the surrounding areas.

Extensive efforts in prior education and alignment resulted in a united coalition of support. Springfield City Council was presented with evidence-based rationale for implementing the policy, as well as poignant testimony from many in the community to the value of curbing tobacco addiction. Councilmembers took notice.

"I'm proud to be voting for this bill tonight," Councilman Matthew Simpson said just prior to the vote. "In addition to the powerful testimony we heard, I appreciate this was a community-wide effort based on evidence-based policy."

The measure passed unanimously and was implemented on July 16, 2019.



Several community partners, including local physicians, appear outside Springfield's Historic City Hall after their testimony before Springfield City Council in favor of Tobacco 21.

The #HealthierMO initiative is seeking more stories like this one that demonstrate how partners in Missouri's greater public health system are working together to transform the future of public health in order to offer every resident the fair opportunity to choose a healthier life. If you have a story to share, email Communications Coordinator Jaci McReynolds at jmcreynolds@healthiermo.org. Learn more about the #HealthierMO grassroots initiative and how you can get involved at HealthierMO.org or on Facebook [@HealthierMO](https://www.facebook.com/HealthierMO).