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## **Scorecards Highlight Gaps in CA Local Cannabis Policies Amid Rising Public Health Concerns** *California Cities and Counties Urged to Step Up for Public Health and Social Equity*

(Oakland, CA) — Today, [Getting it Right from the Start](#), a project of the Public Health Institute (PHI), released its [6th Annual State of Cannabis Policy in California Scorecards](#), offering a comprehensive overview of cannabis policies in cities and counties that allow retail sales. The 2024 scorecards identify critical opportunities to shape a safer local cannabis marketplace amid rising public health concerns, but many jurisdictions are not yet opting to go beyond basic state law to prioritize health, protect youth, or advance social equity. Notably, many of the scorecard's recommendations align with those endorsed in the [October 30 report](#) by the High-Potency Cannabis Scientific Committee, convened by the California Department of Public Health in response to Governor Newsom's directive.

"As cannabis products have become increasingly potent and industry marketing ever more appealing to youth, there is an urgent need for stronger regulatory protections that recognize rising public health concerns," said **Dr. Lynn Silver, MD, MPH, pediatrician and project founder**. "Our scorecards provide a resource for communities looking to adopt evidence-based practices and set a standard for responsible cannabis regulation."

The 2024 scorecards assess jurisdictions on a 100-point scale, with higher scores representing stronger public health measures enacted over the past five years. Evaluations are based on six categories: retailer requirements, taxation, products, marketing, smoke-free air, and equity measures.

**The City of Pomona** topped this year's scorecard with a record-breaking 60 points, driven by innovative policies such as pre-reviewing marketing materials to prevent youth appeal, supporting equity applicants, educating consumers with health information, and allocating funds to youth programs. **The City of Fresno** ranked second with 54 points, excelling in maintaining smoke-free air, reserving licenses for equity applicants, and minimizing youth exposure to storefronts and marketing. Despite these achievements, the **statewide average score remains low—22 out of 100 points** for jurisdictions allowing storefront sales and just 12 points for those permitting delivery only. The scorecards also show that fully **67% of Californians** are now living in areas where legal cannabis is available, up from 55% in 2019.

"The dedication of many California regulators and community advocates to creating systems that balance public health and the industry is encouraging," said **Alisa Padon, PhD, the project's research director**. "This year, we were thrilled to see scores improve in many cities and counties across the state. We hope to see this trend continue, as there are still enormous opportunities for local action."

Alarming public health trends underscore the need for local action. In 2021, [cannabis use by California teens](#) was higher among teens who lived closer to retailers. The percentage of U.S. 12th graders using cannabis vapes, which are high-potency products, [nearly tripled over six years](#), with 14% reporting

recent use. Use during pregnancy, which is associated with harm to both [mother](#) and [baby](#), [nearly doubled](#) in California and is [higher in areas with more retailers](#). California's poison control centers handled [830 cannabis-related calls](#) for children aged five and under—up 155% since 2018. California also witnessed a [1808% relative rise in cannabis-related emergency visits](#) among older adults from 2005 to 2019.

“By limiting the number of retail cannabis permits to four, entering community benefits agreements with our dispensaries, and enforcing strict annual inspections, the City of Pomona has worked to ensure that cannabis businesses integrate into our community responsibly,” **said Monica Montanez, MPP, Community Health Worker, City of Pomona.** “The Cannabis Scorecards serve as an invaluable guide, offering expert feedback and actionable insights that help empower us to strengthen public health protections, safeguard youth, and promote equity while identifying areas for continued improvement.”

A recent survey led by the project's Dr. Ryan Whitacre found that 83% of local elected officials in California support prohibiting cannabis product packaging that appeals to youth. Yet, **only 14 of the state's 539 localities** have enacted any cannabis product restrictions. However, some jurisdictions showcase what is achievable, with many of their policies aligning with the recommendations of the “High-Potency Cannabis Scientific Committee” For example, **San Luis Obispo** prioritizes applicants committed to offering low-THC products, while **Grass Valley and Cathedral City** impose higher taxes on high-potency products. Addressing the risks of flavored inhalable products known to attract youth use, **Contra Costa County, Watsonville, Chico, and Mammoth Lakes** have implemented laws to restrict them.

**Other notable findings include:**

- **Retail Location Limits:** 78% (stable) of jurisdictions permitting storefront retailers set a limit on the number of licenses they would issue. 31% (down 1%) required retailers to maintain a greater distance from schools than state law mandates. But the store to people ratio fell to 1:17,000 in 2023 vs. 1:21,000 in 2019.
- **Local Cannabis Taxes:** 177 jurisdictions collect local cannabis taxes, an increase of 46% since 2018. However, only 25 jurisdictions dedicate revenue to community reinvestment, prevention efforts, or youth programs.
- **Smoke-Free Policies:** A growing proportion of jurisdictions keep storefronts smoke-free (139, 67%), and a growing number (85) prohibit temporary events in public spaces. However, 49 jurisdictions now allow on-site consumption, raising concerns about a return to "smoke-filled rooms" and worker health. The passage of the Cannabis Cafe bill this year heightens the urgency for local jurisdictions to act decisively to keep air smoke-free.
- **Equity Initiatives:** Although still limited, 38 jurisdictions enacted equity policies for hiring or licensing, an increase from six jurisdictions in 2019.

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*Getting it Right from the Start, a project of the Public Health Institute, works with states, cities, counties and community partners to develop evidence-based model policies and provide guidance on cannabis policies that can help reduce harms, protect against youth and problem cannabis use, and advance social equity.*