



# Tobacco Retail License

## What Policymakers Need to Know

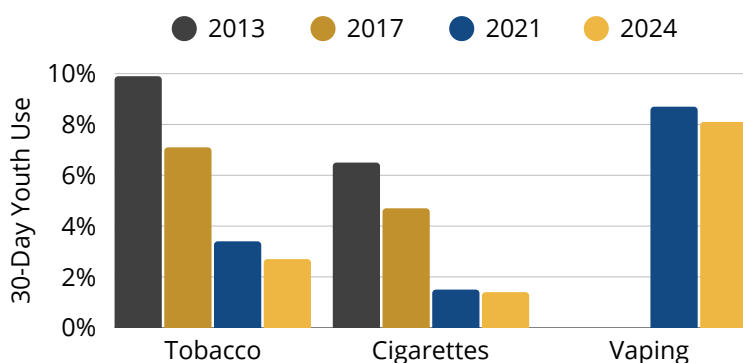


Harmful tobacco products are sold to minors in Tennessee. Tobacco retail licenses help identify where products are sold; a retail license is an evidence-based method to prevent illegal sales to minors.

## Why This Matters

According to the CDC, states with comprehensive tobacco retail license programs report **lower prevalence of tobacco and nicotine use** than states with less stringent regulations.

- Requiring a license to sell tobacco prevents youth initiation of use (Public Health Law Center, 2010).
- Licensure enhances enforcement of tobacco control policies (Institute of Medicine, 2007).
- Retail license enhances regulatory control, reducing ease of access to tobacco products for persons under 21 (U.S. Surgeon General, 2012).



Source: National Survey on Drug Use and Health, Tennessee, Ages 12-17

## The Facts

- Approximately **40 states** have tobacco retail licenses to ensure compliance with age restrictions and facilitate tax collection.
- Vaping is part of a broader retail environment: many stores sell both vapor and tobacco products. A license prevents product-shifting.

### The Issue

- 43% of 15--20-year-old e-cigarette users were sold these products from a retail store, despite laws prohibiting sales.
- Tennessee is one of only about 10 states that does not have a licensing program to enforce Tobacco 21 laws.

### Interesting Anecdotes

- There are at least 13,500 known stores selling nicotine in TN, more than 40 times McDonald's locations.
- Compare this to the 3,300 nicotine retailers in the UK.
- 20% TN retailers failed underage sales compliance checks by TABC in 2025.

### The Solution

Evidence-based policy solution includes:

- Licensing all retailers that sell nicotine products.
- Implementing fees sufficient to cover the cost of enforcement.
- Regular compliance checks.
- Escalating penalties when Tobacco 21 laws are repeatedly broken.

