

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota

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December 4, 2023

Members of the St. Paul City Council and Mayor Carter,
City of St. Paul
15 Kellogg Blvd W
St. Paul, MN 55102

Dear Members of the St. Paul City Council and Mayor Carter,

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota strongly supports the City Council's proposed ordinance to reduce the number of tobacco licenses in St. Paul. As the largest health plan in Minnesota, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota is committed to improving the health of all Minnesotans, which is why we strongly support local policy change such as this ordinance.

The health of residents in a given area deteriorates when there is an increased presence of tobacco and e-cigarette retailers. This is evidenced by higher rates of youth initiation into commercial tobacco use, elevated daily cigarette consumption among smokers, as well as increased difficulty in quitting. Additionally, the concentration of these retailers is notably higher in neighborhoods with a significant proportion of low-income, Black, and Latino residents. These communities are specifically targeted by tobacco companies, leading to a disproportionate burden of health issues related to tobacco use.

To prevent a further concentration of commercial tobacco retailers in St. Paul, it is crucial to reduce the total number of licenses. This reduction will contribute to a less concentrated retailer density, correlating with lower overall rates of tobacco use. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota supports your initiative to decrease commercial tobacco licenses in St. Paul. With these changes, St. Paul is taking significant strides toward fostering a healthier community.

I hope the City Council will consider and pass this bold public health policy.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Bukata Hayes'.

Bukata Hayes
Vice President, Racial and Health Equity and Chief Equity Officer
Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota