

2020 POLICY ASSESSMENT

In a year that has seen the scourge of the COVID-19 pandemic, extreme economic uncertainty, and deep divisions among Americans, U.S. cities have shown remarkable resilience. Throughout the country, cities are taking meaningful action and finding innovative solutions to protect the health and well-being of their communities. City leaders are also responding by striving to address health disparities and achieve racial equity.

BACKGROUND

CityHealth, an initiative of the de Beaumont Foundation and Kaiser Permanente, helps cities attain better outcomes for their residents by advancing a menu of proven policies that improve people’s day-to-day health, well-being, and quality of life. These policies are based in research, backed by qualified experts, and have been shown to have bipartisan support, making them rich opportunities for cities to pursue.

Each year, CityHealth scores the nation’s 40 largest cities on their progress in adopting nine key policies, using gold, silver, and bronze medals. Cities’ overall medal results are based on the combined strength and number of the policies they have in place.

KEY FINDINGS: Milestone Achievements

Despite 2020’s challenges, this year marks a significant milestone in CityHealth’s annual ratings. In 2020, **90% (36/40) of America’s largest cities earned an overall medal**, an increase from 75% in 2019, and nearly double the number from CityHealth’s first assessment in 2017 (47.5%). **More than 43 million people now live in a city that has earned an overall medal**, compared to 29 million in 2017.

In 2020, 10 cities earned an overall gold medal: Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles, Louisville, New York, San Antonio, San Francisco, and Seattle.

Atlanta and Louisville earned their gold medals for the first time. Eleven additional cities improved their overall medal

OVERALL RESULTS

Out of the nation’s 40 largest cities, there were:



90%

of cities earned an overall medal in 2020

up from 75% in 2019



43.6

million people live in a city that has earned an overall medal

up from 29 million in 2017

2020 CITYHEALTH GOLD MEDAL CITIES

Atlanta	Dallas	New York	Seattle
Boston	Los Angeles	San Antonio	
Chicago	Louisville	San Francisco	

score: Albuquerque, Charlotte, Las Vegas, Milwaukee, and Philadelphia moved from bronze to silver; Columbus, Jacksonville, Memphis, Mesa, Nashville, and Phoenix earned a bronze medal for the first time.

CityHealth also achieved a milestone in individual policy medals: **for the first time, all 40 cities earned a gold medal for Tobacco 21, up from just 13 cities in 2017.** This achievement was the result of locally-driven innovation that ultimately became the law of the land. CityHealth’s first assessment in 2017 found that only 13 cities had Tobacco 21 policies, with more joining each year until the passage of federal legislation in December 2019.

KEY FINDINGS: Policy Medals

America's largest cities earned 22 new medals in 2020, with gains in Tobacco 21, earned sick leave, high-quality, accessible pre-K, and Complete Streets. From Philadelphia's adoption of high-quality, accessible pre-K to Albuquerque's passage of a Complete Streets ordinance, cities are using policy as a lever to improve people's quality of life and helping their communities thrive.

Cities received a gold, silver, bronze, or no medal, depending on the strength of their policies. For a full description of how medals are awarded for each policy, please see the accompanying methodology document at cityhealth.org/reports.



Affordable Housing/ Inclusionary Zoning

Affordable housing promotes diverse, inclusive neighborhoods and positive mental health, reduces crowding and exposure to environmental hazards, and frees up resources for individuals to pay for other critical needs. CityHealth's assessment of affordable housing policies looks at cities' inclusionary zoning policies, which are planning ordinances that require developers to set aside a portion of housing units for low- and moderate-income residents.

CityHealth analyzed the size of developments covered by the law, what percentage of units must be made affordable, and whether the program is evaluated for effectiveness.

**The state of affordable housing/
inclusionary zoning in big U.S. cities**

**13 of 40 cities received a medal for affordable housing/
inclusionary zoning policies, with
3 gold, 6 silver, and 4 bronze.**



Complete Streets

Complete Streets policies prioritize safety by incorporating the needs of all forms of transportation, from walking, to biking, to driving or taking the bus. These policies expand economic growth, improve individuals' health, and can save lives.

CityHealth's medal criteria for Complete Streets policies are based on whether they require compliance, whether they explicitly accommodate all ages, abilities, and modes of transportation, and whether the city assigns an agency to oversee implementation.

The state of complete streets policies in big U.S. cities

37 of 40 cities received a medal for Complete Streets policies, with 30 gold, and 6 silver, and 1 bronze. Albuquerque earned a gold medal and Columbus earned a bronze medal in 2020.



Earned Sick Leave

Earned sick leave policies help reduce the spread of contagious illnesses, increase employment and income stability, and save cities money in health care costs.

CityHealth rated the quality of earned sick leave policies based on how many family members and what size employers are covered by the law, as well as the number of hours of leave employees can earn.

The state of earned sick leave laws in big U.S. cities

24 of 40 cities received a medal for earned sick leave laws, with 6 gold, 6 silver, and 12 bronze. Denver earned a gold medal in 2020.



Food Safety

Policies that require food establishments to publicly post food safety inspection grades empower consumers, reduce food-borne illness, and save on health care costs.

CityHealth found that strong policies in this area include routine inspections of food establishments, assignment of a rating, and public posting of those grades outside of the restaurants.

The state of food safety ratings policies in big U.S. cities

15 of 40 cities received a medal for restaurant inspection ratings policies, with 12 gold and 3 silver.



Healthy Food Procurement

Policies that ensure food sold and served in city buildings meet basic nutritional standards can provide more residents with affordable and healthy food choices and may reduce some of the high medical costs associated with obesity.

Cities with strong healthy food procurement policies set and apply nutrition standards to all foods served and sold on city property.

The state of healthy procurement policies in big U.S. cities

20 of 40 cities received a medal for their healthy procurement policies, with 9 gold, 7 silver, and 4 bronze. Fort Worth earned a silver medal in 2020.



Smoke-Free Indoor Air

These policies protect non-smokers from the harmful effects of tobacco — which is the largest preventable cause of death — and reduce smokers' consumption of tobacco at the same time.

The strongest policies ban indoor use of tobacco products in the most locations — such as workplaces and public spaces — while not exempting places like bars, restaurants, or any other public places.

The state of smoke-free indoor air policies in big U.S. cities

37 out of 40 cities received a medal for smoke-free indoor air laws, with 21 gold, 14 silver, and 2 bronze.



High-Quality, Accessible Pre-K

High-quality, accessible pre-K improves children's school readiness and success. Long-term benefits include higher high school graduation rates, lower rates of crime and teen pregnancy, higher lifetime earnings, and better health outcomes.

In partnership with the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), CityHealth assessed the availability of high-quality pre-K in large cities against research-based benchmarks that identify the minimum policies necessary for effective programs. CityHealth's medals applied NIEER's benchmarks, along with an assessment of the enrollment of 4-year-olds in the city's pre-K programs.

The state of high-quality, accessible Pre-K in big U.S. cities

33 of 40 cities received a medal for high-quality, accessible pre-K, with 15 gold, 3 silver, and 15 bronze. Louisville, Memphis, and Philadelphia earned gold medals in 2020.

“This November voters overwhelmingly approved a funding measure to provide **universal access to high-quality preschool for all 3- and 4-year-olds** in Multnomah County. This investment will help us realize a community-led vision for equitable access to preschool built on years of work by myself and so many others. I am thankful to CityHealth for recognizing that high-quality preschool is a public health matter and focusing on high-quality, accessible preschool policy that improves the lives of kids across our country.”



— Commissioner Jessica Vega Pederson, Multnomah County-District 3 (Portland)



Safer Alcohol Sales

Policies that address a high density of alcohol outlets can reduce crime, increase safety, and reduce spending on health care and criminal justice costs.

Zoning alcohol outlets can be an effective means to improve public safety, yet not all cities have the authority to do so.

The state of safer alcohol sales in big U.S. cities

16 out of 40 cities received a medal for safer alcohol sales, with 8 gold and 8 silver.



Tobacco 21

Policies that raise the minimum legal age for the sale of tobacco to 21 reduce the number of young people using these products, which greatly reduces their risk for addiction and disease.

Locally-driven efforts have pushed Tobacco 21 adoption at the state and federal levels, culminating in the passage of federal Tobacco 21 legislation in December 2019. CityHealth awards credit to cities for laws passed that affect their jurisdiction, even if it is passed at a higher level of government (i.e. county, state, or federal). For this reason, all 40 cities were awarded gold medals in 2020.

The state of Tobacco 21 policies in big U.S. cities

40 of 40 cities received a medal for Tobacco 21 policies, with all 40 cities earning gold in 2020.






OUR METHODS

America’s largest cities face a myriad of challenges that impact the health and well-being of residents, with many exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The CityHealth policy package is not intended to be an exhaustive list to solve every pressing local problem; instead, the nine policies selected meet the specific criteria of being: 1) largely under city jurisdiction; 2) backed by evidence; 3) pragmatic, including a likelihood of gaining bipartisan support; and 4) replicable, having been successfully implemented in at least one U.S. jurisdiction.

CityHealth’s 40-city assessment combines the input of national experts to determine the “gold standard” for each policy with legal analysis by the Center for Public Health Law Research at Temple University’s Beasley School of Law. Based on the laws in place, CityHealth identified which elements are necessary for the best quality policy (gold), a good policy (silver), and a passable policy (bronze). Cities with no policy, or a policy that did not meet the minimum requirements, received no medal. Additional information, such as instances where states preempt municipalities from passing particular policies, is available at cityhealth.org. The complete criteria and methodology can be found at cityhealth.org/reports.

CityHealth analyzed the cities’ total performance and awarded overall medals accordingly:

-  **GOLD:** the city received five or more gold medals across each of the nine policies.
-  **SILVER:** the city received five or more gold or silver medals across each of the nine policies.
-  **BRONZE:** the city received four or more gold, silver, or bronze medals across each of the nine policies.

“As a result of the pandemic, we are even more aware of health disparities that have existed for far too long. Over the course of the year, I’ve prioritized policies that can help improve the health of Atlanta



residents, including providing healthy food on city property. Poor nutrition contributes to high rates of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and makes people more vulnerable to COVID-19. CityHealth has been a great partner in this work, providing policy briefings and best practices from across the country.”

— Atlanta City Councilmember Andrea L. Boone

NEXT STEPS

CityHealth’s goal is that all city leaders will use this assessment as a tool to work together and move toward the gold standard for each policy. These data are intended to serve as an accountability framework, giving residents, policy-makers, and community leaders the tools to drive health improvements in their cities.

We invite city officials, community leaders, and others interested in advancing policies to engage with us at cityhealth.org/join-us. We will assess cities with this policy package again in 2021, with plans to release an updated and expanded CityHealth policy package for assessments beginning in 2022.

CityHealth presents the 2020 ratings of how the nation's 40 largest cities fare in nine policy areas that have a proven impact on people's well-being and quality of life. Learn more about each city at cityhealth.org

CITYHEALTH, an initiative of the de Beaumont Foundation and Kaiser Permanente, works to advance a package of evidence-based policy solutions that will help millions of people live longer, better lives in vibrant, prosperous communities. CityHealth regularly evaluates cities on the number and strength of their policies. Learn more at cityhealth.org.

	2020 OVERALL MEDAL	AFFORDABLE HOUSING	COMPLETE STREETS	EARNED SICK LEAVE	FOOD SAFETY	HEALTHY FOOD PROCUREMENT	HIGH-QUALITY, ACCESSIBLE PRE-K	SAFER ALCOHOL SALES	SMOKE-FREE	INDOOR AIR	TOBACCO 21
Albuquerque	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	
Atlanta	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	
Austin	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	
Baltimore	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	
Boston	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	
Charlotte	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	
Chicago	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	
Columbus	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	
Dallas	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	
Denver	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	
Detroit	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	
El Paso	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	
Ft. Worth	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	
Fresno	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	
Houston	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	
Indianapolis	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	
Jacksonville	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	
Kansas City	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	
Las Vegas	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	
Long Beach	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	
Los Angeles	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	
Louisville	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	
Memphis	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	
Mesa	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	
Milwaukee	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	
Nashville	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	
New York	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	
Oklahoma City	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	
Philadelphia	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	
Phoenix	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	
Portland	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	
Sacramento	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	
San Antonio	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	
San Diego	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	
San Francisco	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	
San Jose	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	
Seattle	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	
Tucson	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	
Virginia Beach	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	
Washington, D.C.	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	

= city improved overall medal status since 2019.