

# Smoke Shop Outlet Report Brevard, NC

APRIL 2025



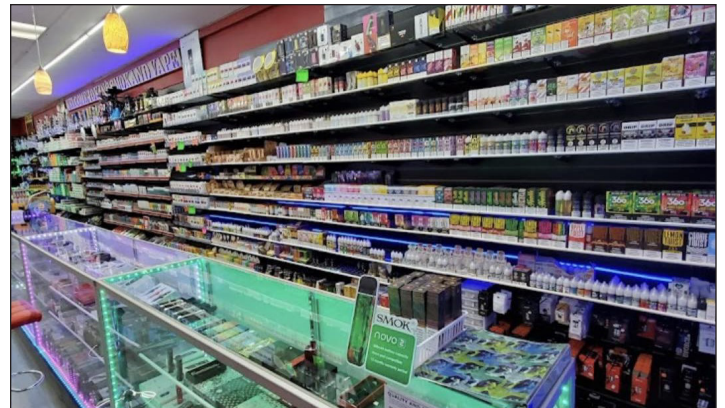
PRODUCED BY THE  
CARE COALITION OF TRANSYLVANIA COUNTY

## introduction

The CARE Coalition is committed to reducing substance use in Transylvania County by changing community norms, limiting access and availability of drugs and alcohol, promoting recovery, and reducing harm.

Environmental scans and key informants have identified the recent proliferation of retail stores that sell vape, cannabis, hemp, tobacco, and other licit substances (collectively “smoke shops”) as a growing public health concern, especially for local youth.

- Neither these stores nor their products are regulated at the local, state, or federal level.
- Individual store owners who might want to vet products for quality, potency, or unknown additives must do so independently and at their own cost. This lack of regulation leaves consumers vulnerable to false advertising, exposure to harmful ingredients, and other potential risks such as unintentional overdose.
- Since 2019, North Carolina has seen a 600% increase in emergency department visits for cannabis ingestion among children and youth ages 17 and younger. North Carolina has no minimum age for the purchase of intoxicating cannabis products. There are no safety regulations for packaging, and many edibles have packaging that appeals to children or mimics popular snacks.
- Nicotine and tobacco products have a federally mandated minimum purchase age of 21. However, North Carolina has not adopted the state Tobacco 21 law, meaning retailers in the state can still sell tobacco and nicotine products to individuals ages 18-20 unless it is enforced by a federal agency, such as Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms. This discrepancy creates enforcement challenges, as the legal age for purchase differs between federal and state levels.



- With the exception of kratom (limited to ages 18+), other products typically sold in these stores have no minimum age requirement. As a result, it is up to individual store owners and clerks to decide whether to impose age restrictions, relying solely on their own discretion and self-regulation.
- Even for products that do have age restrictions, both student data and community reports suggest that access to these products remains easy for youth. Locally, 12% of high school and 5% of middle school students report that their peers obtain vapes from stores. Parents, school staff, and other community members have also reported instances of students purchasing products from these stores.

In response to these concerns, the coalition conducted outlet scans of these establishments to identify the scope of products available for purchase in Transylvania County, as well as advertising and signage at these locations. This report summarizes the findings from outlet scans conducted in fall 2024 through spring 2025.

The purpose of this report is to assist the CARE Coalition in educating stakeholders and community members about emerging drug trends, how they present in the retail environment in Transylvania County, and strategies that can protect local youth and the general public.

# methodology

The outlet scans were conducted between August 28, 2024, and April 3, 2025 by staff and volunteer members of the CARE Coalition.

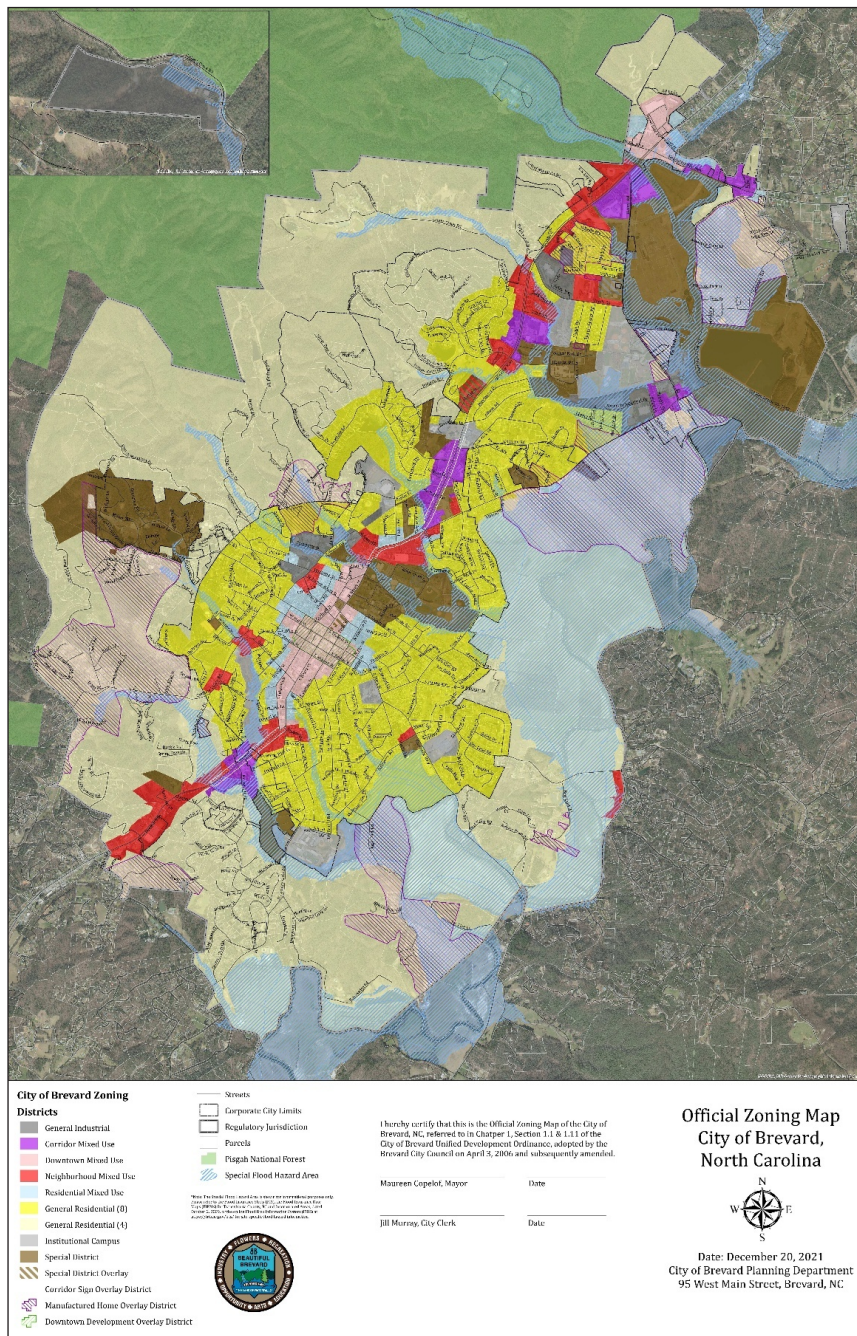
Teams visited all stores in the county that promote themselves as selling tobacco, nicotine, vape, and hemp products, excluding gas stations, pharmacies, and general merchandise retailers (Walmart, etc.).

All 12 locations were located within the City of Brevard and its Area of Extraterritorial Jurisdiction (see map below).

The team utilized an outlet scan survey tool to collect data on posted regulations, available products, marketing strategies, outlet density, and proximity to schools and/or childcare facilities.

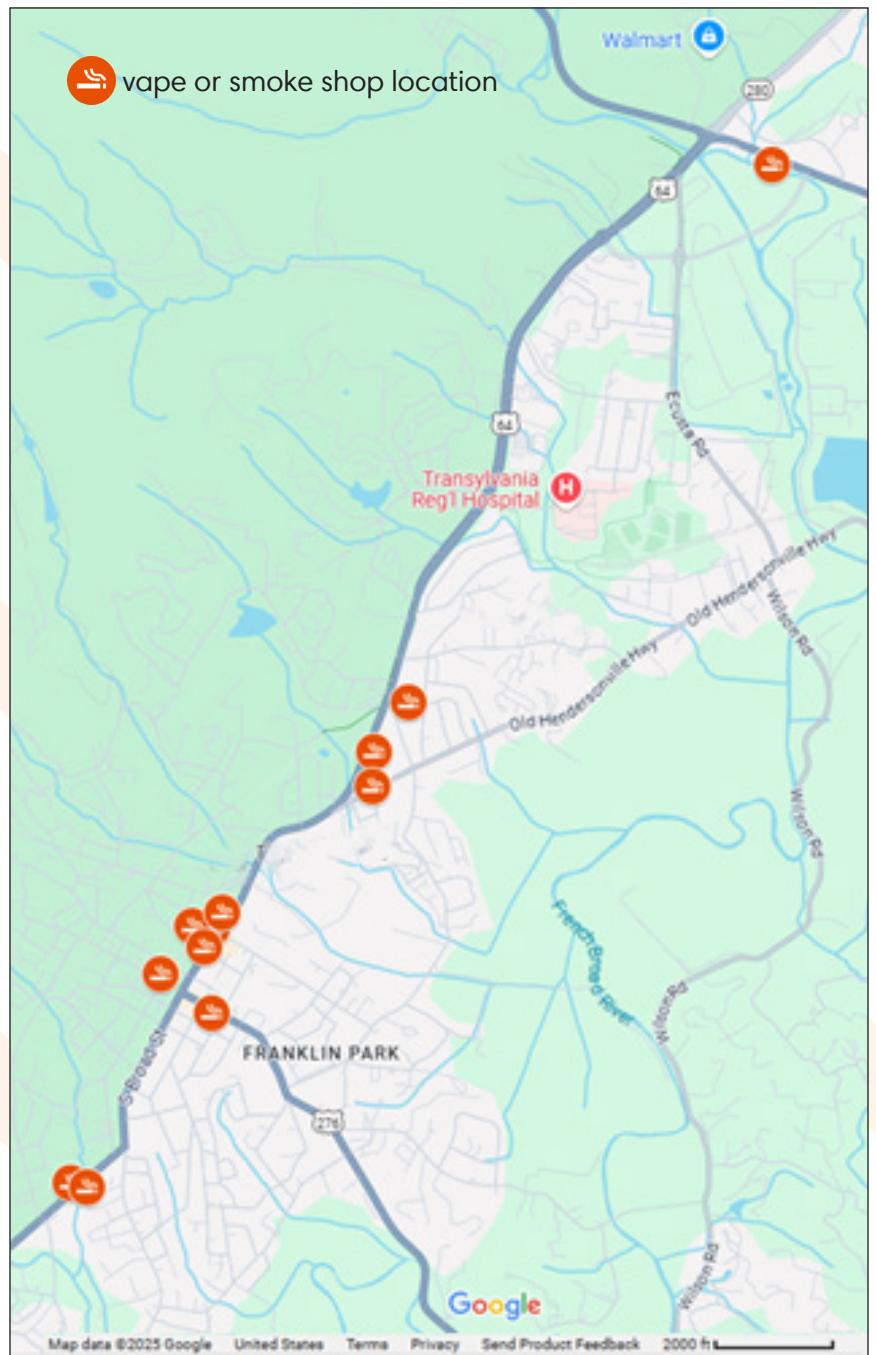
During each visit, data collectors observed the store's interior and exterior, noting products being sold, age-to-purchase signage, and advertisements.

Data collectors also spoke with store staff to learn more about different products and trends.



The stores surveyed, locations, and dates visited were:

- Apotheca Cannabis Dispensary  
161 N Broad St, Brevard  
April 3, 2025
- Asheville Vapor  
285 N Broad St, Brevard  
August 28, 2024 (has now closed)
- Blue Dreams Smoke Shop  
29 W French Broad St, Brevard  
August 28, 2024
- Brevard Hemp  
19 N Caldwell St, Brevard  
August 28, 2024
- Classic City Hemp  
192 Asheville Hwy, Brevard  
December 13, 2024
- King Smoke and Vape Shop  
19 Chestnut St, Brevard  
August 28, 2024
- MGD Tobacco and Vape  
167 Rosman Hwy, Brevard  
August 28, 2024
- Mountain Valley Cannabis  
226 Hendersonville Hwy, Pisgah Forest  
December 13, 2024
- Octopus Gardens  
210 Rosman Hwy, Brevard  
August 28, 2024
- Pisgah Dispensary  
100 E Main St, Brevard  
August 28, 2024
- The Plug Smoke Shop  
101 Old Hendersonville Hwy, Brevard  
December 13, 2024
- Toucan Tango  
203 N Caldwell St, Brevard  
December 13, 2024



# key findings

## PRODUCTS SOLD

Outlet scans found the following items being sold in stores. See the following pages for more information about each of these products.

Cannabis, hemp, and related products:

- All 12 stores sold CBD, THC, and Hemp products
- 11 stores sold Delta 9 products
- 10 stores sold Delta 8 products

Tobacco and nicotine products:

- 8 stores sold nicotine vapes (electronic nicotine delivery systems) and other tobacco products (e.g., smokeless tobacco, cigarettes, cigars)
- 6 stores sold e-juice (nicotine juice for electronic cigarettes)

Miscellaneous products:

- 7 stores sold Kratom, an herbal extract with opioid-like effects.
- 4 stores sold Amanita, a mushroom product with hallucinogenic effects.
- 2 stores sold Tianeptine, an anti-depressant with opioid-like effects that is not approved for use in the U.S.
- 1 store sold Phenibut marketed as 'similar to Adderall.'
- 10 stores sold paraphernalia (e.g., bongs, bowls, grinders).
- 5 stores sold gadgets for products (e.g., lanyards, stickers).



## ADVERTISING SIGNAGE

Most stores had external signage advertising the products sold inside. Common examples included large neon signs (e.g. "Vape", "THC") and specific product advertisements (e.g. for smokeless tobacco, vapes, or CBD/THC products).

A few stores only displayed their name and logo as exterior advertisements.

## AGE RESTRICTION SIGNAGE

Only 7 stores displayed exterior signage stating that customers must be 21 or older to purchase products, while 10 stores had similar signage inside.

This means that 5 stores did not have age restriction signs outside the building and 2 stores did not have them inside.

## YOUTH-TARGETED MARKETING

Data collectors specifically looked for advertising directed towards children and youth. Only 2 stores displayed products featuring marketing with cartoons, Disney characters, candy, and toy-like items.

The remaining 10 stores lacked overt youth-targeted advertising, but many sold products with fruity/candy flavors and edibles that appeal to young people.

## DISTANCE FROM SCHOOLS & CHILDCARE FACILITIES

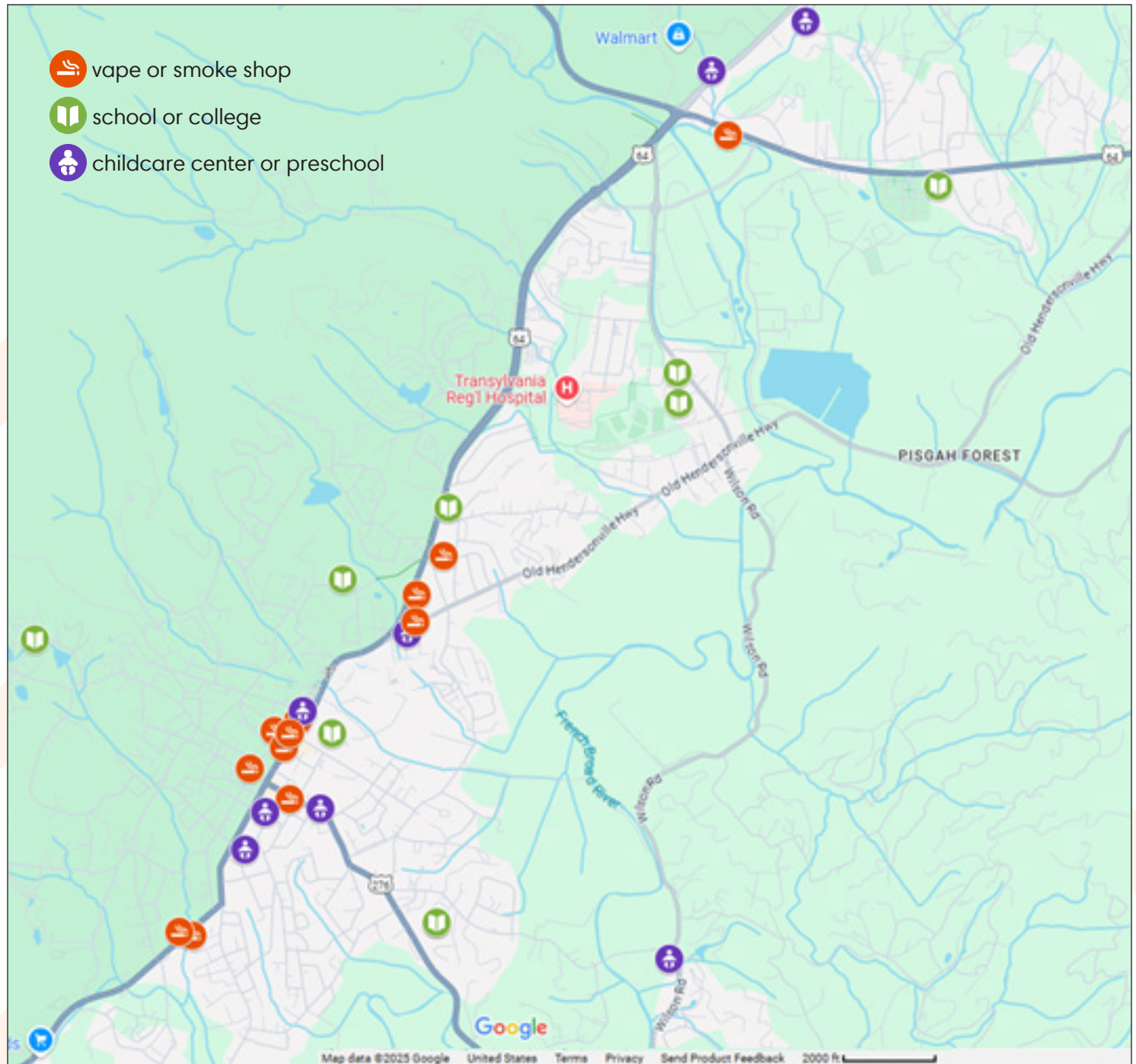
Each surveyed outlet was located within 0.5 miles of a school, college, childcare center, or preschool.

Some locations were within sight distance of these youth-serving facilities, and most are located on roads traveled to and from these facilities.

## OUTLET DENSITY

At the time of data collection, all 12 shops were within the 5.35 square miles of Brevard city limits, equating to approximately 1 shop per 0.4 square miles.

Based on population estimates, this calculates to a density of 1 shop per 645 residents in Brevard, or 1 shop per 2,841 residents in Transylvania County.



# product information

## CBD (Cannabidiol)

CBD is an active compound found in cannabis that is nonpsychoactive. There are a wide variety of CBD products on the market including foods, candies, oils, lotions, and capsules.



Many CBD products are marketed for pain management; however, most CBD products are not FDA approved. Side effects include interference with other drugs, liver damage, drowsiness, changes in mood.

There is no state or federal minimum age to purchase CBD products.

## Delta 9 THC (Tetrahydrocannabinol)

Commonly known as THC, Delta 9 is the primary psychoactive compound found in cannabis. It is responsible for the “high” associated with cannabis use. THC can be consumed by smoking, vaping, edibles, capsules, or topical creams.

Physiological effects include increased heart rate, coordination problems, and lung irritation. Psychological effects include euphoria, altered perception, memory impairment, anxiety, and paranoia.

THC is illegal in North Carolina. However, manufacturers and retailers exploit loopholes by 1) selling products that contain THC in amounts below the legal threshold of 0.3%, and 2) extracting THC from hemp that contains less than 0.3% THC, distilling it, and concentrating it into edibles, drinks, and vape juice at a much higher potency.

They also sell alternative THC compounds, such as THCA, which remains legal in its raw form but converts into Delta 9 THC when heated—producing the same effects as the illegal substance. Currently, there is no state or federal minimum age to purchase the THC products that are legal to be sold.



## Delta 8 THC (Tetrahydrocannabinol)



Delta 8 THC is also a cannabinoid found in the cannabis plant. It often has lower concentrations of THC than delta 9 and therefore is less potent.

Its psychological and physiological effects, methods of consumption, and legal status/age restrictions are the same as delta 9 THC.

## Hemp

A variety of the cannabis plant cultivated for industrial and consumable uses, hemp typically contains levels of THC too low to produce psychoactive effects. Hemp products vary from edible hemp seeds to topical lotions and textile fibers.

Hemp is permitted by law to contain up to 0.3% THC in the unprocessed plant. There is no state or federal minimum age to purchase hemp products.



## Nicotine Vapes/E-Cigarettes

Electronic nicotine delivery systems, including vapes and e-cigarettes, are devices that heat a liquid containing nicotine, flavoring, and chemicals to create an aerosol, which is then inhaled.

Nicotine is a highly addictive chemical found in tobacco products. The concentration of nicotine in current day vapes is much higher than in cigarettes. Nicotine poisoning can occur when consumed in large doses. Additionally, hard metals and chemicals such as formaldehyde are common ingredients in vapes.

Psychological effects include addiction, stunted brain development, attention impairment, and increased risk for depression and anxiety. Physiological effects of nicotine includes increased heart rate and blood pressure (leading to heart disease risk over time), lung damage, and cancer. “Popcorn lung,” or bronchiolitis obliterans, is a serious and irreversible lung disease that causes scarring and inflammation. Many flavored vape liquids contain diacetyl, which, when inhaled regularly, can lead to this condition.

As of 2019, the federal minimum age to purchase nicotine and tobacco products is 21. However, North Carolina has not adopted this legislation, and retailers can still sell to individuals ages 18-20.



## Combustible Tobacco Products

Smoked forms of tobacco, including cigarettes, cigars, and cigarillos, burn tobacco to deliver nicotine and other chemicals through inhalation.

These products contain thousands of harmful substances such as tar, carbon monoxide, and formaldehyde, many of which are known to cause cancer and other serious health conditions.

The other psychological and physiological effects and legal status/age restrictions are the same as nicotine vapes and smokeless tobacco.



## Smokeless Tobacco/Nicotine

These nicotine products are consumed without combustion. They include dip, chew and pouches that are used in the mouth and lip.

These products are known to cause oral health problems such as gum disease and tooth decay. The other psychological and physiological effects and legal status/age restrictions are the same as tobacco and nicotine vapes.



## Amanita

A mushroom with hallucinogenic effects, amanita is often sold as edibles and teas.

Physiological effects include vomiting, drowsiness, and loss of coordination. Psychological effects are similar to other psychoactive mushrooms and include euphoria, altered perception, confusion, and hallucinations. Toxic amounts of amanita can lead to delirium, seizure, and in some cases, death.

In the US and North Carolina, amanita is not classified as a controlled substance and therefore is legal to sell. However, there are no regulatory laws in place for amanita and there is no federal or state minimum age to purchase.



## Kratom

Kratom is known for its stimulant and analgesic effects. An herbal extract from a tree native to Southeast Asia, kratom is commonly sold in capsules, teas, or mixed into food products.

Its impact on the body depends on the dose: small amounts act as a stimulant, while larger doses have sedative effects similar to opioids. Many users take it as a substitute for opioids when they are unavailable or to bypass drug screens. Use can lead to dependence, withdrawal symptoms, and risk of overdose.

In North Carolina, kratom is legal, but there are no quality control regulations. You must be at least 18 years old to purchase it.



## Phenibut

A depressant originating from Russia, phenibut is not approved by the FDA for medical use in the US. It is commonly consumed as a powder or a capsule.

Physiological effects can include sedation, dizziness, tolerance/dependence, and withdrawal. Psychological effects can include mood changes and cognitive impairment.

Since phenibut is not classified as a controlled substance, it can be sold legally and has no regulations, including a federal or state minimum age to purchase. (Phenibut is an emerging drug and follow-up visits are needed to look for this drug explicitly.)



## Tianeptine

Often sold as tablets under brand names such as "ZaZa," tianeptine is an anti-depressant with opioid-like effects not approved for use in the US. Sometimes referred to as "gas station heroin," it can lead to misuse and dependence.

Physiological effects can include drowsiness, confusion, coma, and death. Psychological effects are similar to opioids, including euphoria, sedation, mood swings, emotional blunting, and impaired judgment.

As of December 2024, tianeptine is classified as a Schedule II controlled substance that is now illegal to sell or possess without a prescription. (The stores that sold this product were surveyed prior to the ban going into effect. Follow-up visits will need to be conducted to determine compliance.)



# conclusions

Unregulated substances with addictive and mind-altering properties are readily available within the City of Brevard. Smoke shops offer a vast array of products including cannabinoids, kratom, variations of delta THC, highly concentrated nicotine vapes, and other novel psychoactive substances, many of which are known to have serious health risks.

Additionally, the rapid proliferation of smoke shops has led to a high concentration of outlets within the community, increasing access and availability for both youth and the general population.

The rise in youth vaping may draw more young people into these stores, where they are then exposed to and able to purchase additional harmful products.

Ambiguous age restrictions and the lack of regulation of both stores and products put both youth and the general public at risk. Stronger policies and statutes could regulate licit substances and the stores that sell them, limit access and availability to youth, and comply with similar standards of alcohol and tobacco control.

# recommendations

At the state level, recommended policies include: instituting minimum age of purchase and possession; requiring licensing to sell; restricting advertising that is visible to minors; mandating child resistant packaging.

Local ordinance recommendations include: prohibiting stores within 1 mile of a school; limiting number of retailers within city limits; passing vape-free ordinances; instituting a moratorium on new stores; enforcing city code that restricts store-front advertising; passing social host laws for cannabis products.

Concerned individuals can take the following steps to support this work:

1. Do your own research.
  - Visit a variety of these stores and learn about the products they sell.
  - Look into the products mentioned in this report and dig deeper into the 'licit drugs' landscape.
  - Connect with the CARE Coalition with questions and to discuss how you can get involved.
2. Advocate for policies that protect our youth.
  - Write or call your state representatives and encourage them to support protective policies.
  - Educate local leaders on the importance of limiting youth access to nicotine, cannabis, and other licit substances.
  - Join the CARE Coalition in exploring policies that limit youth access and regulate retail advertising.

## GET INVOLVED WITH THE COALITION

- **Attend a CARE Coalition meeting**  
Second Wednesday of each month at 1:00pm  
In person (Community Services Building conference room, 106 E. Morgan St.)  
Via Zoom (email [carecoalition@tconc.org](mailto:carecoalition@tconc.org) to receive a link to join the meeting)
- **Subscribe to our mailing list**  
Email [carecoalition@tconc.org](mailto:carecoalition@tconc.org)
- **Learn more about the coalition online**  
Visit [www.transylvaniacares.org](http://www.transylvaniacares.org)
- **Join one of CARE's project teams**  
Contact us for dates, times, and more info



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