South Australia's tobacco retail landscape and its intersection with socioeconomic factors and smoking prevalence.

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Introduction: Tobacco product availability is higher in residential areas with lower socioeconomic advantage, which can further widen tobacco-related health and disease burden inequities. This study aimed to describe retail availability of tobacco products in South Australia, and examine the association between tobacco vendor location, population socioeconomic status, and tobacco smoking prevalence.

Method: Cross-sectional 2022 tobacco vendor license data and 2021 to 2022 state-wide population health survey data from the South Australian Department of Health were used. Tobacco vendors were enumerated by community statistical areas using geocoding software, with each area assigned health survey derived smoking prevalence, socioeconomic status, remoteness category, area, and population size. Descriptive and linear regression analyses were used to assess differences in tobacco vendor density by these factors.

Findings: From 2022, there were 1724 tobacco vendors in South Australia and the overall tobacco smoking prevalence across the state was 11.8%. Regression analyses indicated that vendor density increased with socioeconomic disadvantage and geographic remoteness, and that smoking prevalence was higher in areas with lower socioeconomic advantage. Vendor density was unrelated to tobacco smoking prevalence.

Conclusion: Outcomes were consistent with existing research indicating greater tobacco availability in socially disadvantaged areas. This supports that tobacco vendor saturation may be directed to areas in a way that promotes tobacco availability for vulnerable populations. Our finding that smoking prevalence was unrelated to tobacco availability contrasts existing literature, and further research is needed.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Tobacco retailer density is a key policy measure for controlling tobacco accessibility and reducing smoking prevalence, as evidenced by retailer reduction measures in New Zealand. As Australia's current tobacco reforms focus little on retailer availability versus other measures (e.g., product composition), further evidence and advocacy for this key policy measure is warranted.