Understanding the role of U.S. state tobacco control program managers in tobacco control

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Purpose:
To understand the role of program managers working in state level tobacco control departments in the United States.

Literature suggests administrative officials are influential policy actors...

But little is known about the role of tobacco control program managers in policy development, or the decision making context they operate within

How?

Interviews with 12 tobacco control program managers purposively selected across the US

Iterative qualitative thematic analysis

Key Findings

Program managers perform diverse functions

Provide education to legislators | Elevate policy ideas | Support local policy action | Strategic planning and coordination | Administer grants | Program management | Support tobacco surveillance

Program managers operate in complex and constrained policy ecosystems

Vested political interests | Crowded policy landscape | Rapidly evolving market | Prohibitions against lobbying | Bureaucratic hierarchies | Funding constraints | Legal risks

> "If you if your advocacy partners aren't on the same page, we all don't share the same agenda [...] **you gotta all be singing the same song**."

> "There's that line, you know. I think there's a lot of **fear of crossing that line.** That advocacy line."

> "[...] just there's that fear of being the first one and everyone knows they're going to be **sued by the industry**."

Program managers exercise their agency in strategic, often indirect ways

Coordination and alignment...	to have impact in a busy policy environment
Leveraging advocacy partners...	to mitigate the constraints of "the advocacy line"
Mobilizing youth groups...	to de-politicize tobacco control
Building momentum at the local level...	to circumvent weak political will at the state level
Strategic policy selection and framing...	to maximize chances of success

Conclusions

Program managers are **influential actors** in tobacco control policy, operating as **bridges** within a fragmented system

Program managers' roles are **distinct, multifaceted, and relational**, and they have a range of policy levers at their disposal

Researchers wishing to engage with program managers must **account for complexity**

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