



Smoke Shop Outlet Report: Henderson County, North Carolina

Prepared and Produced by Hope Coalition with
support from Henderson County

Introduction

Hope Coalition is committed to supporting our community's mental, physical, and social health. This work includes prevention of and awareness about substance use.

In the summer of 2025, The CARE Coalition* of Transylvania County released a Smoke Shop Outlet Report. They graciously allowed us to use their work toward creating a similar report for Henderson County.

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 not have age restrictions, both student data and community reports suggest that access to these products remains easy for youth. Parents, school staff, and other community members have also reported instances of students purchasing products from these stores.



To address these concerns, we conducted an outlet scan of these establishments to identify the scope of products available for purchase in Henderson County. The scope includes advertising and the signage of these locations. This was conducted in the summer of 2025.

This report was created to educate and inform the community about emerging drug trends, how they present in the retail environment in Henderson County, and strategies that can protect local youth and the public.

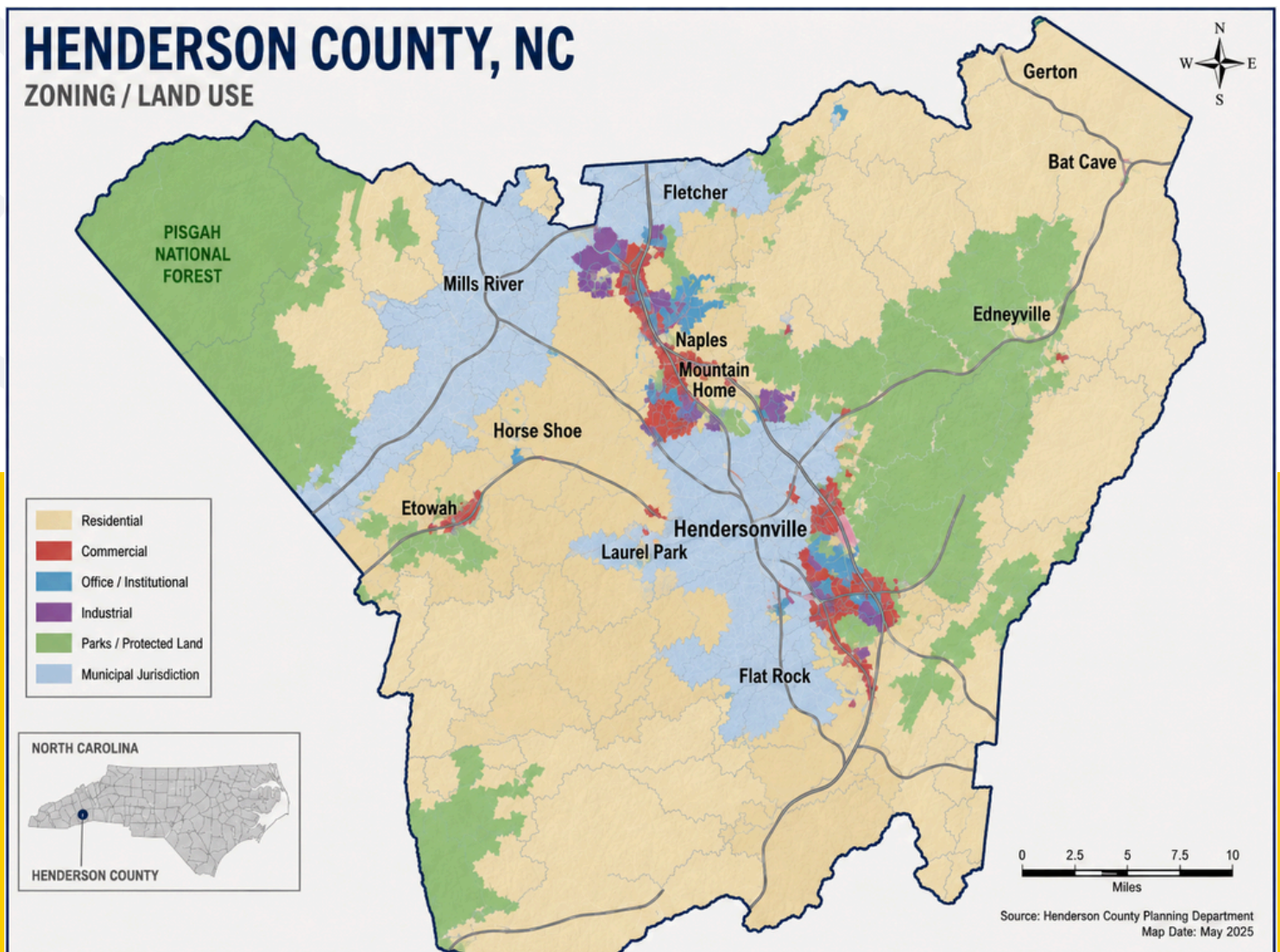
*The 2025 CARE Coalition Smoke Shop Outlet Report is available at <https://care.transylvaniacounty.org/smoke-shop-report/> We are immensely grateful for their shared methodology & content allowing us to quickly replicate this important work.



Methodology

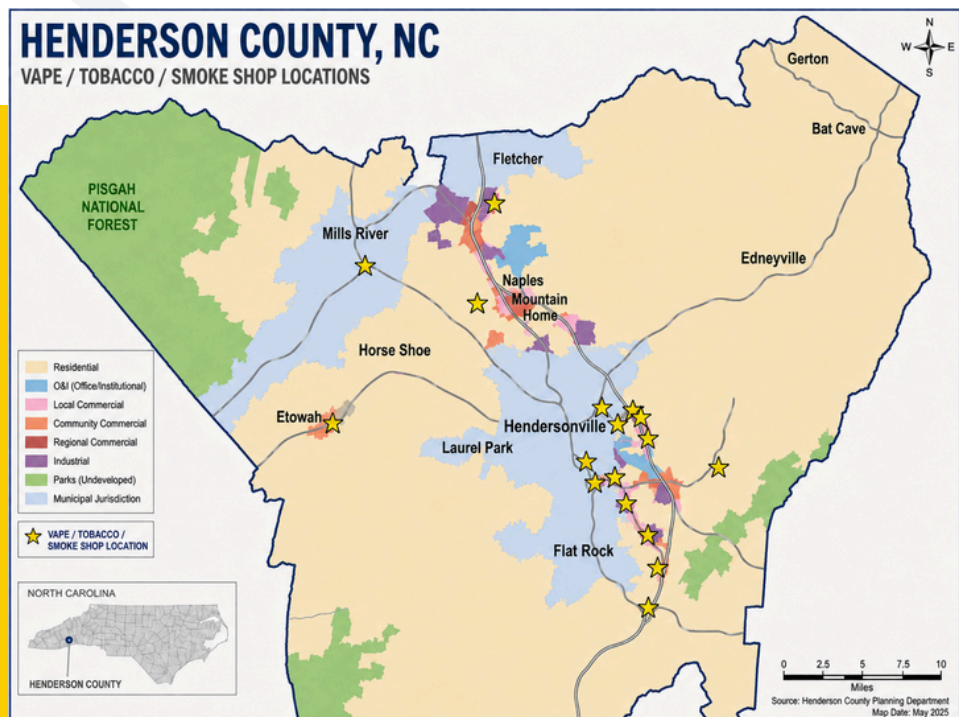
These outlet scans were conducted over July and August 2025. We visited all the stores in the county that promote selling tobacco, nicotine, vape and hemp products. This excludes gas stations, pharmacies and general merchandise retailers (Walmart, etc.). We identified 16 locations in Henderson County.

We utilized an outlet scan survey tool to collect data on posted regulations, available products, marketing strategies, outlet density and proximity to school and/or childcare facilities. During each visit, we observed the store's interior and exterior, noting products being sold, age-to-purchase signage and advertisements. We also spoke with store staff to learn more about the different products and trends.



Surveyed Stores

- Mills River Tobacco & Vape
4176 Haywood Road, Unit A
Mills River
- City Corner Tobacco & Vape
409 Kanuga Rd
Hendersonville
- ROCK STORE
3930 Chimney Rock Rd
Hendersonville
- Etowah Tobacco & Vape
115 Etowah Center Dr.
Etowah
- ESMOKE TOBACCO & VAPE
168 Highlands Square Dr.
Hendersonville
- Harvested Dreams
1705 Asheville Hwy
Hendersonville
- Purple Discount Vape & Dispensary
3877 Hendersonville Road
Fletcher
- Four Seasons Tobacco & Vape
671 Spartanburg Hwy
Hendersonville
- Vape On LLC
2560 Chimney Rock Rd
Hendersonville
- Smoke Shop & Exotics
1772 Howard Gap Road Unit 3
Hendersonville
- The Plug Smoke Shop-Drive Thru
1911 Four Seasons Blvd
Hendersonville
- Franny's Farmacy
128 Hendersonville Crossing
Hendersonville
- M&A Smokes and Vape
2111 Asheville Hwy #12
Hendersonville
- HVL Tobacco & Vape
1338 Asheville Hwy, Suite A
Hendersonville
- Octopus Garden Smoke Shop
2000 Spartanburg Hwy
Hendersonville
- Apotheca
924 Asheville Hwy
Hendersonville



Key Findings

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 stores, except Vape On, sell CBD, THC or other hemp products
- 15 stores sell Delta 8 products
- 15 stores sell Delta 9 products

Tobacco and nicotine products:

- 12 stores sell nicotine vapes (electronic nicotine delivery systems) and 13 stores sell tobacco products (smokeless tobacco, cigarettes, cigars)
- 10 stores sell E-juice (nicotine juice for electronic cigarettes)

Miscellaneous products:

- 14 stores sell Kratom, an herbal extract with opioid-like effects
- 13 stores sell Amanita, a mushroom product with hallucinogenic effects
- 1 store sold Phenibut, a depressant that is not FDA approved for medical use
- 15 stores sold
- Paraphernalia
- (e.g., bongs, bowls, grinders)
- 7 stores sell
- Gadgets, (e.g., lanyards, stickers)



Advertising Signage

Most stores had external signage advertising the products sold inside. Common examples included bright colorful signs, (e.g., Vape, Cigar, THC). Some were more specific about products sold there (e.g., Vapes, Smokeless Tobacco, CBD/THC products).



Age Restriction Signage

10 stores displayed external signage of age restriction signs (e.g., 21 or older, We Card), to purchase products. 10 stores also displayed internal signage of age restriction. 5 stores displayed neither signage.

We also talked with some of the workers and they all said they ask for ID. However, only the Apotheca stores require that everyone scan their ID, to ensure it is authentic.



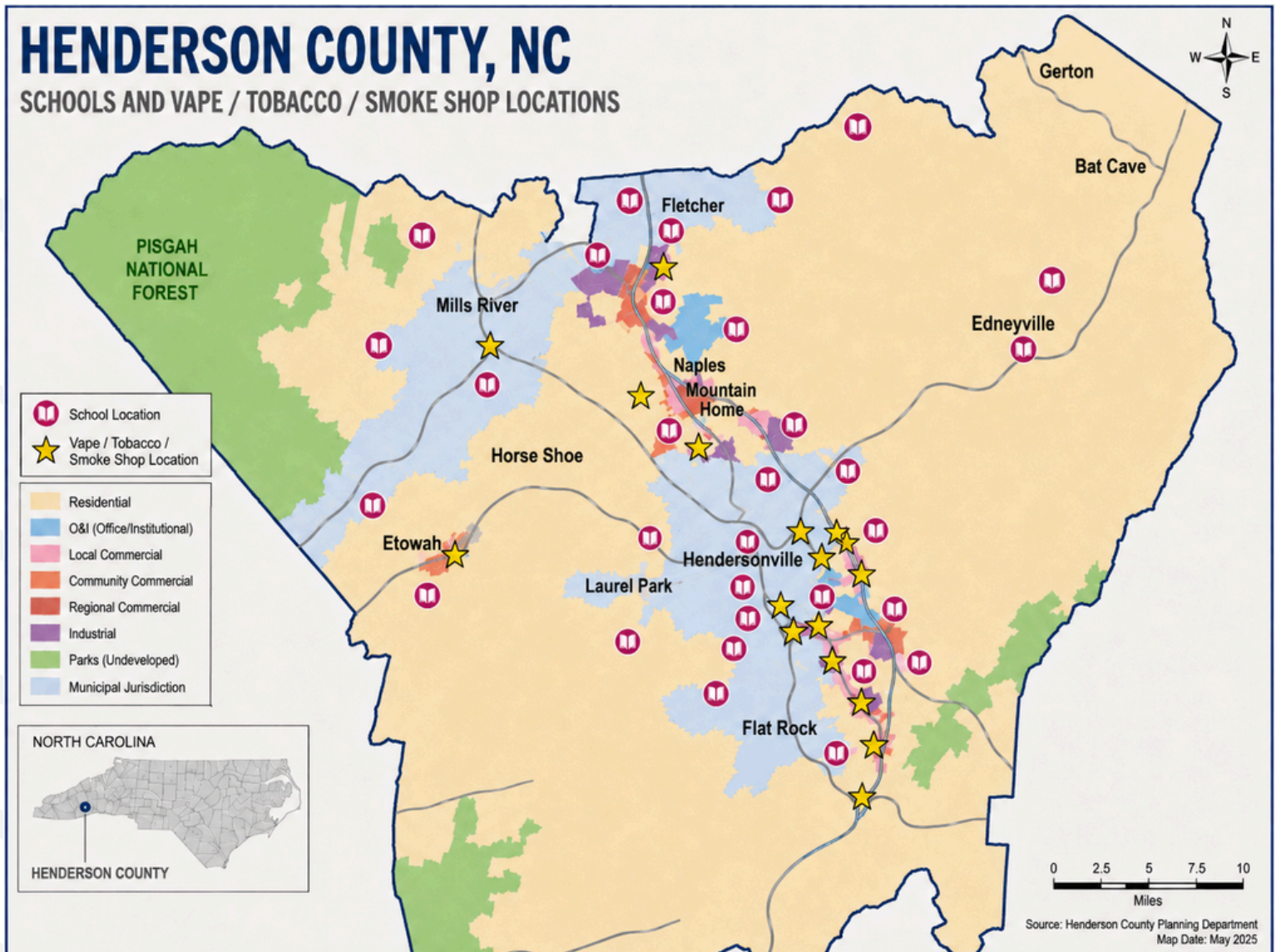
Youth-Targeted Marketing

We also looked for products targeting youth, which includes marketing colorful candies, colorful packages, etc. They found two stores that sold products targeting the youth. Of those, one store only displayed lollipops, and the other offered a variety of silly pops, lollipops and very colorful mushroom packets.

The remaining 14 stores lacked overt youth-targeted advertising. However they still sold fruity/candy flavored products that could potentially appeal to young people.

Proximity Findings

The outlet surveys indicated that shops range from 400 ft to 2 miles from a school or childcare. The map below indicates that most schools have a shop right across the road. Some of these locations are on the way to or from these schools and childcare facilities.



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.



Smokeless Tobacco/Nicotine

These nicotine products are consumed without combustion. They include dip, chew, and pouches used in the mouth and on the lips. 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 those of tobacco and nicotine vapes.





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 include 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.



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 it 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.



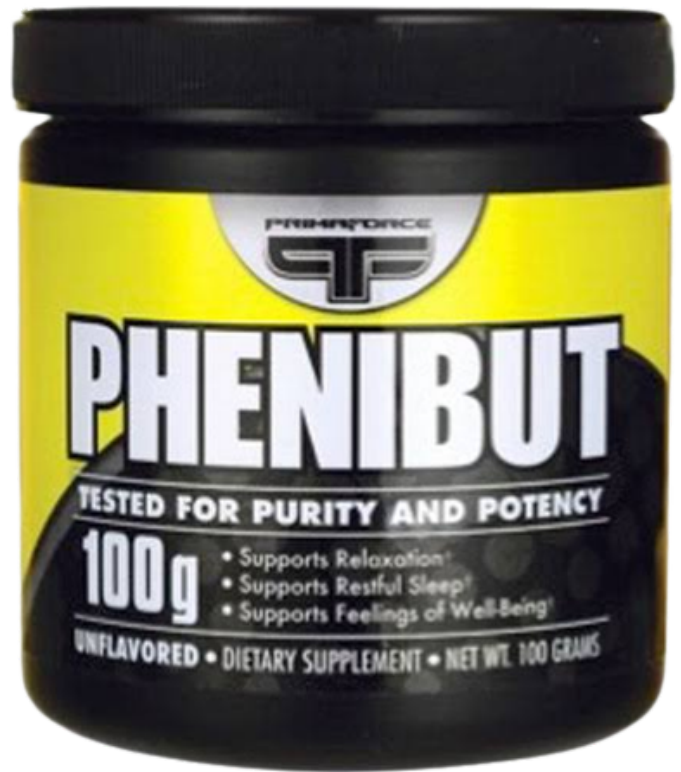
Kratom

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 antidepressant 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 Henderson County. 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 (Henderson County Board of Commissioners are addressing this, for more info email jgrabowski@hendersoncountync.gov); limiting number of retailers; passing vape-free ordinances; instituting a moratorium on new stores; enforcing codes that restrict 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 Hope 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 local efforts in exploring policies that limit youth access and regulate retail advertising.

Get Involved



In Henderson County:

Visit the Henderson County Strategic Behavioral Health webpage at www.hendersoncountync.gov/behavioral to learn about local efforts to prevent and address substance use and to join the quarterly Substance Use Action Team.

Consider supporting local non-profits that work with people who use drugs. A list of these can be found through the Henderson County website: www.hendersoncountync.gov/health/page/behavioral-health-resources

Become involved with the Hope Coalition through their email list and website.

email: admin@elementsofhope.org

website: www.elementsofhope.org

Hope Coalition owes a debt of gratitude to the following organizations and individuals for this report:

- The CARE Coalition of Transylvania County
- Amber Curry, PSS-C, Henderson County
- Alayna Denny, Intern, Henderson County

Additional Notes

This report was completed on September 3, 2025. Since the landscape around these products is constantly changing (i.e., products, policies, and marketing, etc.) this report may already have outdated information.

Additionally, the CARE Coalition staff noted that both our reports could also have called attention to nitrous oxide and 7 hydroxymitragynine:

- Nitrous oxide is a widely accessible recreational substance that induces rapid euphoric and hallucinogenic effects. While it is typically thought by users to be harmless, nitrous oxide can cause severe neurologic, cardiovascular, and psychiatric signs and symptoms with repeated use.
- Misuse of 7-hydroxymitragynine (7-OH) is highly dangerous due to its potent, concentrated opioid-like effects and significant addiction potential. Unlike natural kratom leaf, where 7-OH is found in trace amounts, commercially sold products contain unnaturally high and sometimes synthetic concentrations of this substance. It is available in most vape stores in Henderson County.

If you or someone you know is interested in receiving support or treatment, help is available, and recovery is possible. Please visit or call one of Hope Coalition's locations for more information.

Recovery Community Center

225 South Grove Street
Hendersonville, NC 28792

828-730-0786

Youth Connection Center

301 North Justice Street
Hendersonville, NC 28792

828-730-0786

