

CHALLENGE

100State Problem-Solving Soiree:
Innovating Public Health with Ninjas for Health

PRE EMPTION

How would you connect advocates to preserve local control?

BACKGROUND

Preemption occurs when higher levels of government (federal or state) eliminate or limit the authority of lower levels.

Preemption has a negative impact on grassroots movement building, and concerns about preemption are nearly universal in public health, including in alcohol policy, nutrition, tobacco control, pesticide regulation, gun violence prevention, food safety, drug policy, and fire prevention. Preemption is often supported by an industry that believes it will benefit from the elimination of state or local authority. Industry lobbyists are generally more powerful in Washington or state capitols than representatives of public health, creating an uneven playing field for policymaking.

State and local governments are laboratories for policies that can be tried in small scale in order to test them for the larger population. Preemption stifles innovation by cutting off this vehicle for creating the next iteration of potential civic solutions. Preemptive language has been used to stop public health protections like smoke-free air laws, sick leave benefits, and nutrition labeling.

This year, the Wisconsin legislature passed sweeping preemption eliminating local control of food. While framed by its authors as stopping efforts to ban supersized sodas, the language is broad enough to block local leadership on regulation of food sales, portion sizes, or nutritional content. It's possible this preemption could stop health efforts like promoting healthy food in vending machines in government buildings. This preemption strategy is designed to cut off innovation off before it happened. As is happening across the country, public health advocates were not aligned, organized, or educated to stop the passage of the preemptive language.



Grassroots Change is a national project funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to bring attention to issues of preemption and grassroots organizing. The mission of Grassroots Change is to empower grassroots leaders to build and sustain effective public health movements at the local, state, and national levels.

Public health movements grow from passion and the commitment to create real change in our nation's health and safety. But effective movements need more than passion, they need smart strategy and the skills to connect and communicate. Grassroots Change is a hub for grassroots advocates working on diverse public health issues, and curates effective grassroots movement building tools. Grassroots Change nurtures grassroots passion and connects leaders with the resources they need to be effective.

QUESTIONS

- 1) How can state and local agencies get organized to stop preemption from stripping their power to protect the health of their neighborhoods?
- 2) How could the web and social networking help connect remote advocates across the US?
- 3) How would you improve the existing social network "GC Connect" (<http://grassrootschange.ning.com>)
- 4) How could diverse partners (nutrition, gun safety, fire prevention) unite under a preemption umbrella?
- 5) What are other ways experiences could be shared in real time?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- <http://grassrootschange.ning.com>
- <http://grassrootschange.net>
- [Banning Local Rules is National Strategy](#)
- [Don't Limit Options for Fighting Obesity](#)
- [Public Health Law Center: Preemption in Public Health](#)
- [Preemption: What It Is, How It Work, and Why It Matters for Public Health](#)