

## **Increase Tobacco Control Measures**

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### **The Issue:**

British Columbia may have the lowest smoking rate in the country (14%), but smoking remains the number one preventable cause of death and disease, responsible for 85% of lung cancers, 30% of cancer deaths, and killing up to 6,000 British Columbians each year.

Second-hand smoke kills up to an additional 140 British Columbians each year. Second-hand smoke can cause lung cancer and heart disease in non-smoking adults, and low birth weight, sudden infant death syndrome, childhood cancers, asthma, and respiratory problems in children. There is no safe level of exposure (US Surgeon General, 2006). The BC government's tobacco control initiatives are laudable. We must continue and expand these efforts if we want to see smoking rates decline further.

### **ACTIONS REQUIRED:**

The Canadian Cancer Society is calling on all political parties to make a commitment to:

#### **a) Ban the sales of cigarettes in pharmacies**

- Selling tobacco products in a pharmacy sends the wrong message to children and undermines educational and tobacco cessation initiatives.
- Nearly two-thirds (64%) of British Columbians support prohibiting the sale of tobacco products in pharmacies (Canadian Cancer Society Advocacy Public Opinion Research Survey, 2008).
- Ten Canadian provinces and territories have adopted legislation to prohibit the sale of tobacco products in pharmacies; only in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and the Yukon Territory are cigarettes still sold in pharmacies. Outside of North America, it is practically unheard of that tobacco products would be sold in pharmacies.

#### **b) Ban smoking on bar and restaurant patios and outdoor public places**

- British Columbians should be protected from second-hand smoke on patios and a variety of outdoor public places, including seating areas of sports arenas, stadiums, sports fields, parks, playgrounds, and beaches.
- Nearly two-thirds (65%) of British Columbians support regulations restricting smoking on outdoor patios of restaurants and bars.
- There is legislation prohibiting smoking on outdoor patios of restaurants and bars in the provinces of Nova Scotia, Newfoundland & Labrador and Alberta, the Yukon Territory, and at least 23 Canadian municipalities, including the Capital Regional District, Vancouver, White Rock, Surrey, Richmond, Pitt Meadows and Port Moody.

### c) Increase the price of tobacco taxes

- Tobacco taxation is the most effective public health policy in lowering tobacco consumption. As tobacco taxes increase, smoking rates decrease, especially among youth, who are particularly price-sensitive. Most studies conclude that a 10% increase in the price of a package of cigarettes reduces overall cigarette consumption by 3 to 5%.
- Both the World Bank and the World Health Organization strongly advocate higher tobacco taxes worldwide. Raising tobacco taxes by \$3.20 per carton of 200 cigarettes would help to reduce smoking rates and increase tobacco tax revenue by approximately \$65 million in the first year of the tax increase. In BC, roll-your-own tobacco is taxed at only half the rate as manufactured cigarettes. Closing the roll-your-own tobacco tax loophole would generate additional health benefits and tax revenue.
- In a poll conducted for the Canadian Cancer Society in February 2006, 81% of British Columbians said they would support increasing tobacco taxes by \$0.40 per package of 25 cigarettes if this could help reduce smoking among teenagers.

### d) Subsidize Nicotine Replacement Therapies

- Smokers should be supported when they attempt to quit. Nicotine Replacement Therapies (NRT) and cessation products combined with physician counseling, are successful in treating tobacco addiction.
- The BC Government has removed the PST on NRT, a step that we strongly support. In addition, the BC Government funds QuitNow.ca and QuitNow by Phone, free smoking cessation programs for all British Columbians.
- For a 3 month pilot program in 2007, British Columbians who were receiving income assistance were given access to free NRT. Another pilot program, for BC government employees and their families, reimburses 80% of the cost of NRT and pharmacotherapy.
- NRT and cessation products should be subsidized for all British Columbians, as the province of Québec has done. There are several options for funding this policy direction, such as assigning a portion of the new money British Columbia will receive from the Imperial Tobacco contraband settlement, or from the additional revenue – some \$65 million in the first year – that the BC government would realize from a tobacco tax increase of \$3.20 per carton of 200 cigarettes.

