

Federal leadership in tobacco control key to achieving positive health outcomes for Canadians

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The Ontario Lung Association is concerned that the federal government's decision to reduce funding of its highly successful Federal Tobacco Control Strategy will threaten Canada's ability to reach the Harper government's goal of reducing smoking prevalence to 12 per cent.¹

A model for tobacco control internationally, the strategy has helped reduce the Canadian smoking rate from 24 per cent in 2000 to 17 per cent in 2010 – significant results that would not have been achievable without leadership from a well-funded Federal Tobacco Control Strategy. Unfortunately, almost five million Canadians still smoke and tobacco remains the leading cause of preventable death, diseases such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and lung cancer, and of healthcare spending across the country.

In this province, 22 per cent of Ontarians have used some form of tobacco in the past month and 18 per cent of Ontarians (12+) are considered current smokers.² Ontario's Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care reports that \$1.9 billion a year is spent in health costs connected with tobacco-related diseases.³ Including productivity losses, tobacco costs the Ontario economy over \$7.7 billion each year, or approximately \$600 per person, including non-smokers.⁴

Federal leadership in the tobacco control movement has been a foundation for the success of tobacco control efforts across the country. Understanding the current need for fiscal constraint, the Ontario Lung Association is concerned that cuts to the cost effective Federal Tobacco Control strategy will be counterproductive: it will impede smoking reduction efforts, putting the future health of Canadians at risk. Half of all long-term smokers will die of smoking-related disease at a significant cost to all levels of governments. Investments in this strategy pay for themselves many times over, in both human and financial terms. A reduction in funding is a step-backwards – to when the focus of health care was less on cost effective prevention strategies and more on expensive patient care. It is essential that the federal government remains a strong and effective partner in tobacco control.

¹ August 20, 2007 Tony Clement, then Minister of Health, announced today that the renewed Federal Tobacco Control Strategy would aim to reduce Canada's overall smoking prevalence from 19 per cent (2006) to 12 per cent by 2011. Source: <http://www.marketwire.com/press-release/canadas-new-government-announces-new-goals-for-smoking-rates-762243.htm> Accessed April 17, 2012.

²Ontario Tobacco Research Unit. Smoke-Free Ontario Strategy Evaluation Report. Toronto: Ontario Tobacco Research Unit, Special Report, October 2011.

³ Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care Backgrounder on Ontario's Health Care Action Plan, January 30, 2012.

⁴ "Your Lungs, Your Life: Insights and Solutions to Lung Health in Ontario" produced by Ontario Lung Association, based on data from: Smetanin, P., Stiff, D., Briante, C., Ahmad, S., Ler, A., Wong, L. Life and Economic Burden of Lung Disease in Ontario: 2011 to 2014. RiskAnalytica on behalf of Ontario Lung Association, 2011.

As federal funding is cut, it will become even more important that the Ontario government maintain and improve its tobacco control efforts. For example, Ontario Lung Association research indicates that if all smokers in Ontario who want to quit smoking had access to behavioural counselling and scientifically proven medications to help them quit, within 10 years it would result in a \$2.8 billion gross savings to Ontario economy, and save thousands of lives.⁵

The Ontario Lung Association delivers a variety of tobacco control programming and is a strong advocate for tobacco control policy. Its activities include public education and social marketing campaigns, cessation support programming and the Smoke Free Ontario funded “Youth Advocacy Training Institute” that builds youth engagement capacity for the field. Beyond advocating for specific tobacco related policy, such as controls on flavoured tobacco and a moratorium on the introduction of new tobacco products, the Ontario Lung Association is currently advocating for an Ontario Lung Health Action Plan, a dedicated, coordinated effort to holistically address the growing burden of lung disease.

As tobacco use is the leading risk factor for lung disease, efforts to drive smoking rates down as fast as possible would be a priority component of such a strategy.

Ontario Lung Association’s message to the federal government: stay focused on what has offered proven results for Canadians. Maintain or increase current funding levels to the Federal Tobacco Control Strategy. The Ontario Lung Association looks forward to continuing to work with tobacco control partners at all levels to further improve the lung health of Canadians.

For more information and to join our efforts to achieve an Ontario Lung Health Action Plan in Ontario, please visit www.on.lung.ca/action plan.

For more information contact:

Elizabeth Harvey
Ontario Lung Association
eharvey@on.lung.ca
416-864-9911 ext. 279 / cellular 416-303-4589

⁵ Ontario Lung Association, op. cit.