

campaign for a smoke-free alberta

HEALTH COALITION URGES THE ALBERTA GOVERNMENT TO STOP STALLING ON MEASURES TO PROTECT KIDS FROM TOBACCO

Tobacco laws shouldn't take a back seat to new cannabis laws

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Edmonton - A coalition of prominent health organizations gathered at the Alberta Legislature today to urge the NDP government to implement stalled tobacco legislation that was approved by the Legislative Assembly over three years ago. The coalition wants the government to protect Alberta youth by fully implementing legislation that is aimed at reducing tobacco product sales to minors, banning all forms of flavoured tobacco, and protecting all workers from all forms of secondhand smoke on the job. The coalition is also urging the government to fully implement the *Alberta Tobacco Reduction Strategy*.

"We urge the Alberta government to move swiftly to implement the stalled tobacco control legislation. Protection delayed is protection denied." said Angeline Webb of the Canadian Cancer Society. "Today we are launching a new provincial campaign urging the government to protect Alberta youth from the most widespread and deadly form of substance abuse in Alberta. We urge all Albertans to visit protectalbertakids.ca to let your MLA know that tobacco legislation needs to be implemented immediately. Alberta youth deserve first-class protection from Canada's leading cause of preventable disease and premature death."

The *Tobacco and Smoking Reduction Act* received almost unanimous support in the Legislative Assembly in 2013. However, the following provisions of the Act currently remain unproclaimed and unimplemented. The coalition is urging the government to fully implement the following measures as soon as possible:

- Implement and actively enforce all tobacco sales to minors requirements;
- Ban all flavoured pipe tobacco including shisha (waterpipe) tobacco;
- Ban all forms of smoking in public establishments and workplaces including waterpipes, cannabis and electronic cigarettes.

"Alberta is the only province without ANY active enforcement of tobacco sales to minors' restrictions" said Lisa Campkin of the Heart & Stroke Foundation. "Evidence shows that strict enforcement of tobacco product sales to minors' laws can help to reduce tobacco use among adolescents. Alberta youth must be protected from illegal sales to minors. We urge the government to implement and enforce this legislation prior to the legalization of cannabis or the problem could get worse. If the government can't control tobacco sales to youth it will have great difficulty controlling cannabis sales to youth."

Alberta has the worst sales-to-minors compliance of any province according to a national Health Canada survey conducted in 2014. Although the provincial legislation approved in 2013 includes stronger measures to reduce tobacco product sales to minors, it remains largely unimplemented and unenforced.

"The tobacco legislation also prohibits the use of waterpipe smoking in public establishments but the law has not been implemented" said Les Hagen of Action on Smoking & Health (ASH). "The popularity of waterpipe smoking among youth has increased dramatically in the past decade including the use of flavoured shisha tobacco. The government must implement the proposed ban on waterpipe smoking in public areas in concert with the proposed ban on flavoured shisha tobacco in order to reverse this disturbing trend. Waterpipe smoking is just as deadly as cigarette smoking and flavoured shisha increases the appeal of this harmful activity."

The coalition is also urging the government to extend the provincial smoking ban to include cannabis smoking and the use of e-cigarettes in indoor establishments and workplaces. The coalition wants all Alberta workers to be equally protected from secondhand smoke at work, including those who work in hookah lounges, cannabis lounges, hotel guest rooms, and group homes. Health groups are concerned that the legalization of cannabis could lead to the renormalization of public smoking.

“Service industry workers deserve full protection from secondhand smoke at work including those working in hookah bars, hotel rooms, and group homes” said Les Hagen. “Thousands of Albertans including adolescents are working in these jobs and they deserve full protection from secondhand smoke on the job. A government that is truly committed to improving working conditions for Albertans would ensure that these workers are protected from known human carcinogens in the workplace.”

The coalition is also concerned that the implementation of the *Tobacco and Smoking Reduction Act* is being delayed while cannabis legislation has been accelerated. Tobacco regulations should not take a back seat especially since tobacco kills at least 37 times more Canadians than cannabis.

“The Alberta government is working on new legislation with measures to protect Alberta youth from the hazards of cannabis use, which is important for public health.” said Jerry Macdonald, president of the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta (CARNA). “It is also essential to fully implement the 2013 *Tobacco and Smoking Reduction Act* because tobacco kills 37 times more Canadians than cannabis. Our young people deserve first class protection from all harmful drugs.”

Along with the legislation, the full implementation of the Alberta Tobacco Reduction Strategy is key to reducing youth tobacco use. The renewed strategy was launched in 2012 but it remains woefully unfunded and largely unimplemented. The strategy is an effective, comprehensive plan to reduce tobacco use in Alberta and is designed to keep Alberta youth tobacco free, to help tobacco users quit and to protect Albertans from secondhand smoke.

Tobacco taxes are the single most effective measure to reduce tobacco use and health groups also want the government to implement a significant tobacco tax increase and to direct a portion of the proceeds to the *Alberta Tobacco Reduction Strategy*. The Alberta government continues to maintain the most affordable cigarettes of any province as a result of suppressed tobacco taxes and high relative wages. Alberta needs to raise its cigarette taxes by \$1.50 per 20 pack to bring its affordability levels in line with British Columbia and by \$2.00 per pack to match Saskatchewan’s. Not one dime of the current tobacco tax revenue is dedicated exclusively to tobacco reduction. A portion of this revenue should be reinvested in effective programs to help smokers quit and to keep kids tobacco free.

In the 2014/2015 school year, over 25,000 Alberta youth in grades 6 to 12 used tobacco products in the last 30 days according to the Canadian Youth Tobacco and Drug Survey commissioned by Health Canada.

The Campaign for a Smoke-Free Alberta is a coalition of prominent health organizations that are working to reduce tobacco use in Alberta.

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