

campaign for a **smoke-free** alberta

- NEWS RELEASE -

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TOBACCO LAWS PIVOTAL TO MEETING NEW CANCER TARGETS

The Campaign for a Smoke-Free Alberta—a coalition of 15 prominent organizations working to reduce tobacco use—believes that the Alberta government will have difficulty meeting its new cancer prevention and reduction targets without passing meaningful tobacco control legislation. Alberta has been ranked as having the worst tobacco control laws in Canada.

Last week, the Alberta government stated that it wants to become a “worldwide leader” in the battle against cancer and it announced a new one billion dollar cancer strategy to help achieve this objective. While the coalition applauds the government’s initiative, it has serious concerns about the government’s ability to meet its targets without passing comprehensive tobacco control legislation.

“Tobacco causes 30 percent of cancer deaths in Alberta” said Dan Holinda, executive director, Canadian Cancer Society – Alberta/NWT Division. “The evidence shows that strong legislation is an essential element of an effective tobacco reduction strategy. The Alberta government needs to adopt strong tobacco laws to reduce tobacco use and to help achieve its cancer prevention and reduction targets. Cancer targets are only as good as the strategies to achieve them”.

At present, Alberta is the only province without any legislation to control tobacco sales and marketing. Alberta’s cigarette tax is now the eighth lowest among all provinces and territories. Alberta also has the weakest smoking restrictions of any province.

“Alberta’s tobacco policy gap is contributing to elevated smoking rates which correspond to higher cancer rates” said Bob Campbell, president of the Alberta Public Health Association. “While we commend the government for setting ambitious cancer reduction targets, the importance of effective tobacco legislation cannot be overlooked if these targets are to be met”.

Last month, Health Canada reported that smoking rates among young Albertans aged 15 to 19 soared upward by 30 percent in the first six months of 2005, translating into over 12,000 new teenage smokers. The rise in teenage smoking has the potential to result in 6,000 more premature deaths, including 2,000 preventable cancer deaths, if these teens are unable to quit smoking.

Alberta has one of the highest rates of per-capita tobacco consumption in Canada, with 1478 cigarettes smoked for every man, woman and child annually. Tobacco sales have increased by nine percent in the past two fiscal years. Alberta represents 40 percent of the total spit tobacco market in Canada.

“Alberta has a serious tobacco problem that must be curtailed if we are to be successful in preventing cancer and other tobacco-related diseases” said Dr. Charl Els, Alberta director of Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada. “The provincial government cannot overlook the single largest preventable cause of cancer if it intends to win this battle”.

Tobacco control legislation is listed as a priority goal of the Canadian Strategy for Cancer Control—the national blueprint for cancer prevention and reduction (see http://www.cancercontrol.org/csc/pdf/Strategy_Framework0405.pdf).

A comparison of provincial tobacco control laws across Canada can be viewed at (see http://www.sources.com/Releases/RMENR233_167.htm).

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