

campaign for a **smoke-free** alberta

- NEWS RELEASE -

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HEALTH GROUPS CALL FOR WAR ON TEEN SMOKING

Edmonton - A coalition of 15 prominent health organizations is calling for a war on teen smoking in response to new survey data revealing that smoking rates are up 30% among young Albertans aged 15 to 19. The coalition is urging the Alberta government to take immediate action to curb teen tobacco use, starting with a two-dollar per pack tobacco tax increase. The coalition is distributing a survey to all of the Tory leadership candidates and all provincial party leaders to find out where they stand on measures to curb youth smoking.

"Smoking causes over 80% of all chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and lung cancer" says Ingrid Meier, board member of the Lung Association – Alberta and Northwest Territories. "We do not want today's teens to become tomorrow's patients. While the Alberta government has developed a good tobacco reduction strategy, in recent years key parts of the strategy, such as tobacco taxation and legislation, have been neglected. We are calling for a full-scale war on teen smoking that includes tobacco tax increases, 100% smoke-free workplace legislation, and restrictions on tobacco sales and marketing".

Alberta has the worst tobacco laws in Canada according to a report card issued last year by the Canadian Council for Tobacco Control. Among provinces, Alberta has the eighth lowest tobacco taxes and it has the worst legislation to protect Albertans from the deadly effects of second-hand smoke. Alberta is the only province without any legislation to control tobacco sales and marketing, thereby giving tobacco companies a leg up over other jurisdictions.

"We believe that the lack of meaningful tobacco policy in Alberta is contributing to the sudden rise in teen smoking" said Dan Holinda, Executive Director of the Canadian Cancer Society, Alberta/NWT Division. "We want to know where all of the leadership candidates and party leaders stand on this issue. Tobacco use places a tremendous burden on our quality of life and our healthcare system and therefore this issue should be front and centre in any legitimate health policy debate".

Along with the candidates survey, the coalition also released the results of a public opinion poll commissioned last year by AADAC regarding Albertan's support for several tobacco policy measures. The Ipsos-ASI survey of 800 Albertans revealed that a convincing majority of respondents supported strong policy measures to reduce tobacco use including tobacco tax increases, a ban on retail tobacco displays and a complete smoking ban in all workplaces including bars, bingo halls and casinos.

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"The government's own surveys reveal widespread public support for strong measures to curb youth smoking in Alberta" said Dr. Charl Els, Alberta director of Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada. "We urge the government to listen to Albertans by taking immediate action to prevent tobacco use among young people. These measures would place Alberta on par with other provinces in dealing with the number one cause of preventable death, disease, and disability. The government has stated that it wants Albertans to become the healthiest people in Canada, starting with our youth. I can't think of a better way to achieve this commendable objective than by passing legislation to protect our youth from tobacco marketing".

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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