



2020

British Columbia

Provincial Election Policy Recommendations

On any given day, 565 Canadians will hear the words, “you have cancer.” Our mission at the Canadian Cancer Society is to eradicate cancer and enhance the quality of life for people living with cancer. To achieve this, we need the support of political parties to implement a strong health agenda that will improve the lives of people with cancer and their families.

The Canadian Cancer Society calls upon all political Party leaders to take up this challenge in the provincial election.

While we have many policy recommendations, our current top priorities are to:

- Ensure equitable access to transportation to and from cancer care through the Travel Treatment Fund.
- Add coverage of the prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test to the Medical Services Plan, when ordered by a physician.
- Implement an annual fee on the tobacco industry to recover the \$25 million annual cost of the B.C. Ministry of Health provincial tobacco control strategy

By implementing these recommendations, the province can reduce the burden of cancer on the healthcare system and have a positive impact on the quality of life for those currently living with and beyond cancer. We look forward to working together to make these changes happen.



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Ensure equitable access to transportation

The Canadian Cancer Society recommends that the provincial government ensure equitable access to transportation to and from cancer care.

The CCS Travel Treatment Fund is an established, audited and integrated part of the BC healthcare system – as well as in other provinces – that supports access to critical cancer-related appointments.

The Travel Treatment Fund provides limited, short-term financial assistance to cover a portion of cancer-related transportation and accommodation expenses for low income British Columbians. The Fund also supports positive mental health by providing referrals to other CCS programming to meet the practical, informational or emotional support needs of British Columbians affected by cancer.

Cancer doesn't stop being a life-changing and life-threatening disease in the middle of a global pandemic. COVID-19 has highlighted the importance of the Travel Treatment Fund as vulnerable groups continue to require safe and accessible transportation options for critical healthcare appointments. However, the impact of the pandemic on funding has put the program under threat and CCS has been seeking new partnerships to ensure this critical program can continue in the long-term.

Ensuring continuation of the Travel Treatment Fund aligns with the Government of BC's focus on poverty reduction and addressing equal access to services in our province. People who live in rural and remote regions of the province often travel several hours to one of BC's nearest cancer treatment centres. Cancer is unique as a chronic disease for its lengthy and repeated treatment options that often render people with cancer physically unable to travel independently.

The distance to treatment and need for assistive supportive care puts a significant financial and emotional strain on people with cancer and their families. The financial burdens of travelling and paying for accommodation in an urban centre while undergoing cancer treatment, often for extended periods of time, are substantial.

Through interviews with regional health authority social workers, we know there is already a large population of people with cancer falling through the cracks who are just outside of government and charitable funding boundaries and in desperate financial need.

In a nationwide program survey, 71% of clients and 57% of caregivers indicated that cancer-specific medical appointments would have been missed if the Travel Treatment Fund was unavailable. In some cases, the costs of accessing treatment can be so significant that clients choose to reduce their recommended course of treatment or abstain altogether.

For these reasons, investing in equitable access to transportation to and from cancer care through the Travel Treatment Fund is critical. The Travel Treatment Fund is a policy solution that addresses the needs of vulnerable British Columbians when they most need support.



PSA test coverage for early detection

The Canadian Cancer Society recommends that the provincial government add coverage of the prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test to the Medical Services Plan, when ordered by a physician.

Prostate cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer among Canadian men with 1 in 9 Canadian men expected to be diagnosed with prostate cancer in their lifetime, yet it is also one of the least preventable cancers. Because it is difficult to prevent prostate cancer, early detection of the disease is critically important. When prostate cancer is detected early, close to 100% of men will survive 5 years or more. In 2020, an estimated 3,100 men in BC will be diagnosed with prostate cancer and 610 will die of this disease.

The prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test is a commonly used blood test that looks for high levels of PSA, a protein made by prostate cells. A small amount of PSA in the blood is normal, but if PSA levels are elevated, a person will typically be sent for further testing to determine if they have prostate cancer or a health concern impacting prostate.

A PSA test can help find prostate cancer early, before it grows large or spreads outside of the prostate. Finding cancer early means that treatments are more likely to be successful. When prostate cancer is found and treated early, the chances of successful treatment are better.

Currently, the BC Medical Services Plan does not cover this important test for asymptomatic individuals who are worried about their health. The cost of PSA test is currently paid out-of-pocket by asymptomatic individuals in BC and ON who would like to take the test after having a conversation with their doctor about the benefits and limitations. All other 8 provinces and 3 territories cover the cost of the test by referral without requiring signs and symptoms. CCS believes Canadians should have equitable access to PSA test for early detection of prostate cancer without having to pay out-of-pocket when they have a physician referral, regardless of where they live in Canada. Lack of coverage may act as a barrier for those who would like testing.

As early and regular testing can lead to better health outcomes for people living in British Columbia, we believe it is the time to commit to PSA testing coverage in the Medical Service Plan.



Annual fee on the tobacco industry

The Canadian Cancer Society recommends that the provincial government implement an annual fee on the tobacco industry to recover the \$25 million annual cost of the BC Ministry of Health's provincial tobacco control strategy.

A tobacco industry cost recovery fee implements the principle of polluter pays and would be similar to the US Food and Drug Administration tobacco fee in place since 2009, which is recovering US \$712 million annually. It would also be similar to the federal cannabis annual regulatory fee to recover \$112 million annually by 2021-22, as well as provincial cannabis fees in Manitoba, Quebec and New Brunswick. Tobacco companies should pay a fee based on market share.

In 1998, BC adopted the Tobacco Fee Act with an annual \$20 million cost recovery fee on tobacco companies, but this legislation was never implemented. Now is the opportunity for all parties in B.C. to commit to do so.

During the 2019 federal election campaign, a cost recovery fee was included in the Conservative platform, and was supported in letters from the NDP, the Green Party and the Bloc Québécois.

Tobacco use is the leading preventable cause of disease and death in British Columbia and in Canada, killing more than 5,000 British Columbians annually, including about 30% of all cancer deaths. While significant progress has been made, there are still 470,000 British Columbians who smoke and an unacceptably high number of youth who begin smoking each year. An enormous amount of work needs to be done to achieve the objective of less than 5% tobacco use by 2035.

The tobacco industry has caused the tobacco epidemic and should be held accountable. It should pay for BC government costs to respond to this epidemic. An annual cost recovery fee for the provincial tobacco strategy would complement the province's lawsuit against tobacco companies to recover health care costs, which is a distinct issue.

A cost recovery fee of \$25 million is easily feasible for the tobacco industry to bear given the additional \$2 billion in revenue tobacco companies have generated Canada-wide as a result of windfall net-of-tax price increases in recent years. A cost recovery fee would generate \$25 million in incremental annual revenue for the BC government, which could be used for government priorities.

An August 2019 Ipsos national opinion poll found that 91% of Canadians and 87% of British Columbians supported "a measure that would make tobacco companies pay the costs of Health Canada's programs to reduce youth smoking."

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About the Canadian Cancer Society

The Canadian Cancer Society (CCS) is the only national charity that supports Canadians with all cancers in communities across the country. No other organization does what we do; we are the voice for Canadians who care about cancer. We fund groundbreaking research, provide a support system for all those affected by cancer and shape health policies to prevent cancer and support those living with the disease.

Help us make a difference. Call 1-888-939-3333 or visit cancer.ca today.

CONTACT

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