

2021 Ontario Pre-Budget Consultation: Recommendations to address tobacco control and youth vaping

Submission to the The Honourable Peter Bethlenfalvy, President of the Treasury Board and Minister of Finance

Introduction

The Alliance for a Tobacco Free Ontario (ATFO) is committed to creating a province free of commercial tobacco and youth vaping. Our members work independently and collaboratively to reduce tobacco use in Ontario. While reducing the use of tobacco and vaping products has been an urgent priority for our organizations for many years, it is even more critical during the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Research shows that smoking tobacco increases the risk of both bacterial and viral infections while e-cigarettes increase the risk of viral infections.¹ Since COVID-19 is a viral infection, tobacco and e-cigarette users are at increased risk of COVID-19 infection. While evidence continues to evolve, it is also highly likely that smoking and vaping may increase the risk of more severe outcomes of COVID-19.^{2 3} With these compounded risks at a time when the health system is already overburdened, the government of Ontario must strengthen action against tobacco and youth vaping now, more than ever.

Recommendations

We recommend the following steps to address tobacco usage and youth vaping in Ontario's 2021 budget:

1. Implement a cost recovery fee on the tobacco industry to recoup the \$44 M spent annually through the Smoke-Free Ontario Strategy and ensure long-term funding for tobacco control
2. Implement a mechanism to reduce the availability of untaxed/ unregulated tobacco
3. Recover any enforcement costs against untaxed tobacco from the tobacco industry
4. Implement a tax on e-cigarettes to reduce the prevalence of youth vaping

¹ Bagaitkar, Juhi et al. 2008. "Tobacco use increases susceptibility to bacterial infection." Tobacco induced diseases vol. 4,1 12.

² Ahmed, N., Maqsood, A., Abduljabbar, T., & Vohra, F. 2020. Tobacco Smoking a Potential Risk Factor in Transmission of COVID-19 Infection. Pakistan journal of medical sciences, 36(COVID19-S4), S104-S107.

³ Wu, Q., Jiang, D., Minor, M., & Chu, H. W. 2014. Electronic cigarette liquid increases inflammation and virus infection in primary human airway epithelial cells. PloS one, 9(9), e108342.

We believe action in these areas will help reduce the prevalence of smoking and youth vaping, benefitting Ontarians now and long after the COVID-19 pandemic is behind us. For further information about these recommendations please contact Liz Scanlon, Director, Health Systems and Policy at Heart & Stroke (liz.scanlon@heartandstroke.ca) or Stephen Piazza, Manager of Advocacy at Canadian Cancer Society (Stephen.piazza@cancer.ca).

This submission is endorsed by the following ATFO Members:



Canadian Cancer Society
Société canadienne du cancer



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