



Canadian Cancer Society
Société canadienne
du cancer



Heart & Stroke Foundation
Fondation des maladies du cœur et de l'AVC...

2020 Ontario Pre-Budget Consultation: Recommendations to address tobacco control and youth vaping

Submission to the The Honourable Rod Phillips, Minister of Finance

Introduction

The Canadian Cancer Society and Heart & Stroke, along with other health focused organizations, work together to promote the control of tobacco industry products in order to protect Ontarians' health and reduce the significant financial impact of these products on the provincial healthcare system and the overall economy. While reducing the use of tobacco and vaping products was an urgent priority for our organizations for many years, it is even more critical during the current COVID pandemic.

Research shows that smoking tobacco increases the risk of both bacterial and viral infections while e-cigarettes increase the risk of viral infections.^{1,2,3} Since COVID-19 is a viral infection, tobacco and e-cigarette users are at increased risk of COVID-19 infection. In addition, Heart & Stroke recently commissioned research indicating that young people share their e-cigarettes with an average of twenty others. Sharing of e-cigarettes was identified by the local public health unit as a factor in a recent COVID-19 outbreak at the University of Western Ontario. While evidence continues to evolve, it is also highly likely that smoking and vaping may increase the risk of more severe outcomes of COVID-19.⁴ 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 2020 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

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. Attached is the February 2020 pre-budget submission from the former Ontario Campaign for Action on Tobacco (OCAT) that provides more details in each of these areas. For further information, 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).

¹ Bagaitkar, Juhi et al. "Tobacco use increases susceptibility to bacterial infection." *Tobacco induced diseases* vol. 4,1 12. 18 Dec. 2008, doi:10.1186/1617-9625-4-12.

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. <https://doi.org/10.12669/pjms.36.COVID19-S4.2739>

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.

⁴ Vardavas CI and Nikitara K. (2020). Covid-19 and smoking: A systematic review of the evidence. *Tob. Induc. Dis.* 2020;18(March):20. <https://doi.org/10.18332/tid/119324>.