

Advancing Public Health and Improving Productivity

A Pre-Budget Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance

Canadian Coalition for Action on Tobacco

August 2017

Executive Summary

The Canadian Coalition for Action on Tobacco (CCAT), comprised of leading health organizations in Canada, urges strengthened federal action to combat the tobacco epidemic. Tobacco remains the leading preventable cause of disease and death in Canada, killing 37,000 Canadians annually. In order to successfully achieve the federal government's commitment of reducing tobacco use to less than 5% prevalence by 2035, a new Federal Tobacco Control Strategy must be comprehensive, robust and sustained, and must move beyond traditional approaches of implementing incremental measures.

In Budget 2018, it is recommended that the federal government enhance Health Canada's Federal Tobacco Control Strategy by providing additional investments to greatly increase impact and to help make Canada *the* world leader in tobacco control.

Introduction

The visionary objective of reducing tobacco use to under 5% by 2035, established by Minister of Health Jane Philpott in February, 2017, is deserving of strong support. Minister Philpott is to be commended for her work on tobacco control, including regarding plain and standardized packaging.

There is a pressing need to reduce the enormous burden of the tobacco epidemic. Tobacco use is the most significant preventable cause of disease and death in Canada, causing 37,000 Canadian deaths each year. Smoking causes cancer, heart attacks, strokes, emphysema, and many other diseases.

Smoking rates in Canada, including among youth, remain unacceptably high, even without including rates of use of tobacco products other than cigarettes. The 2015 Canadian Community Health Survey found a current smoking prevalence of 17.7% for Canadians aged 12+, representing 5.3 million Canadians. While considerable progress has been made, enormous work remains to be done. Taking on a bold approach will position Canada once again as a world leader in tobacco control. Indeed there is no reason why Canada cannot be *the* world leader in tobacco control.

Health Canada has aptly summarized the devastation brought by tobacco:¹

Tobacco use in Canada is a deadly and costly social and public health problem. In fact, it is the leading cause of premature death in Canada. Every year, more than 37,000 Canadians die from illnesses caused by smoking; that is one Canadian every 14 minutes. Smoking burdens Canadian society with \$17 billion in health care and indirect economic costs every year. It also has profound impacts on families and friends caring for the ill and grieving the dead. Tobacco use touches us all.

[...]

Tobacco use is harmful. It causes dozens of preventable, debilitating and fatal diseases in users and those exposed to second-hand smoke. This places a heavy burden on the healthcare system. Exposure to smoke is also associated with low quality of life.

[...]

Tobacco use is not a habit. The ongoing use of tobacco among Canadians is driven in large part by addiction, which in the majority of circumstances begins during youth. Young Canadians are particularly sensitive to the dependence-causing effects of nicotine in tobacco. Eighty-two percent (82%) of current adult daily smokers smoked their first cigarette by the age of 18. Recruitment of new people who use tobacco remains a major concern. In 2015, approximately 115,000 Canadians began smoking daily. [footnotes omitted]

An enhanced Federal Tobacco Control Strategy (FTCS) would complement legislative measures currently being brought forward, including plain and standardized packaging, a ban on menthol, and regulation of electronic cigarettes, as well as numerous other initiatives.

This submission is on behalf of the Canadian Coalition for Action on Tobacco (CCAT). CCAT members include: Action on Smoking and Health (Alberta), Canadian Cancer Society, Canadian Dental Association,

¹ Health Canada, "Seizing the Opportunity: The Future of Tobacco Control in Canada" Consultation Document, released Feb. 22, 2017, p.1.

Canadian Dental Hygienists Association, Canadian Lung Association, Coalition québécoise pour le contrôle du tabac, Heart and Stroke Foundation, Non-Smokers' Rights Association, Ontario Campaign for Action on Tobacco, and Physicians for a Smoke-free Canada.

Recommendation: Enhance Health Canada's Federal Tobacco Control Strategy by providing additional investments to greatly increase impact and to help make Canada *the* world leader in tobacco control.

Given that tobacco is the most significant preventable cause of disease and death in Canada (killing 37,000 Canadians each year), a sustained, well-funded Health Canada strategy is crucial. Tobacco costs the economy \$17 billion annually, including \$4.4 billion in direct health care costs.² It has been estimated that each smoker costs his or her employer on average \$3842 in lost productivity from unsanctioned smoke breaks, and \$414 in lost productivity from absenteeism, for a total of \$4,256 per year.³ Reducing smoking is an effective approach to improving productivity.

While smoking rates have declined, an enormous amount of work remains to be done to keep up with the ever-evolving tobacco industry and to combat the tobacco epidemic.

Health Canada funding for the current Federal Tobacco Control Strategy (FTCS) was greatly reduced in April 2012 to \$38 million per year from about \$54 million, further down from \$72 million in 2003-04. Health Canada's current tobacco control budget of \$38 million per year should be increased significantly to implement many initiatives as part of a comprehensive federal tobacco control strategy, including youth prevention programmes, cessation programmes, mass media, legislative and policy development, enforcement, research and surveillance, and other tobacco control initiatives.

For example, there are no longer any Health Canada advertisements in mass media to discourage smoking. Regular surveillance of tobacco use behaviour among Canadians, which has been weakened, should be improved. Health Canada needs to ensure that the tobacco control capacity, which has decreased, is again sufficient to maximize the impact in combating the tobacco epidemic. Further, among other measures, a wide range of programme initiatives should be enhanced. Evidence-based cessation tools should be free of charge to all Canadians without limits on quit attempts.

The regulatory and policy measures governing tobacco companies in Canada are not proportionate to the fact that tobacco industry products kill when used exactly as intended, causing immeasurable loss of quality of life, burdening the healthcare system, and causing a host of other social and environmental harms.

Additionally, the arrival of e-cigarettes, the growth in water pipe smoking, and the legalization of marijuana all continue to change the marketplace and add complexity to tobacco control. This

² Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse. *The Costs of Substance Abuse in Canada 2002, 2006.*

³ Conference Board of Canada, "Smoking Cessation and the Workplace – Briefing 3, Benefits of Workplace Programs" 2013.

necessitates a comprehensive FTCS strategy with well-funded and sustained resources to ensure that Canada is adequately equipped to address the ever-changing environment.

Internationally, the federal government should support tobacco control, including through the WHO Framework Convention for Tobacco Control, to demonstrate a leadership role in the implementation and advancement of tobacco control at the global level. Tobacco is a global epidemic requiring coordinated worldwide action.

Health Canada's annual tobacco control budget of \$38 million or \$1.04 per capita is much lower than the comparable US federal government annual tobacco control budget (fiscal year 2017-18) of C\$1.1 billion or C\$3.39 per capita (US\$880 million, US\$2.71 per capita, exchange rate 1.25). If Canada had the same C\$3.39 per capita federal investment as the US, Canada's annual federal tobacco control budget would be C\$124 million. Canada's federal government per capita investment in tobacco control should be at least as high as the US federal government.

Health Canada's current tobacco control budget represents just 1.2% of the \$3.2 billion in federal tobacco taxes collected each year.

Conclusion

The Canadian Coalition for Action on Tobacco thanks the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance for the opportunity to provide comments on Budget 2018. CCAT believes that the recommendations outlined in this brief are instrumental to combat the tobacco epidemic in Canada, and urges the committee to endorse these measures.

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