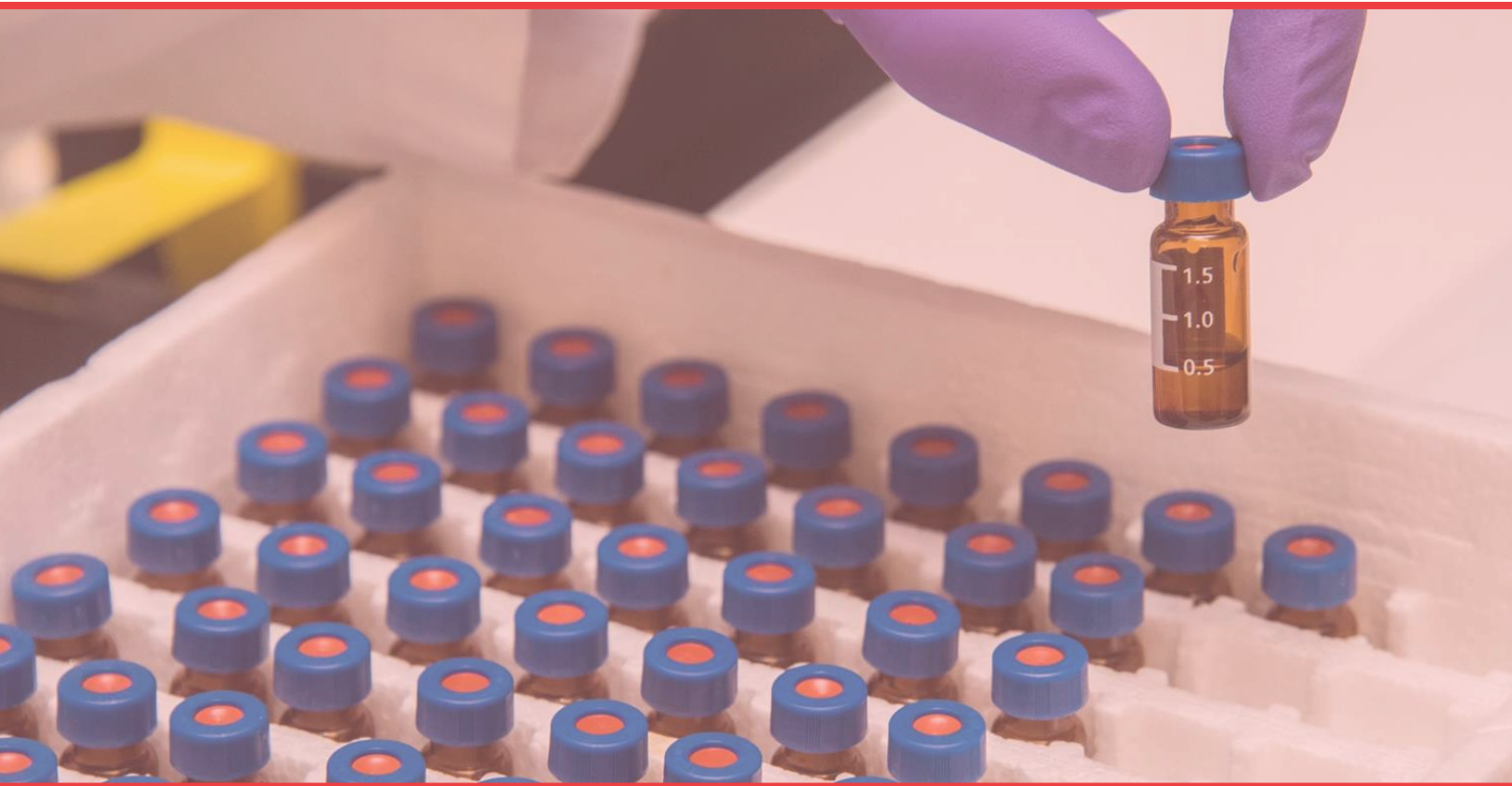




**Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in
Advance of the Upcoming Federal Budget**

August 5, 2020



Recommendations

1. Dedicate funding to a National Lung Health Agenda, a comprehensive approach to lung health that encompasses research, prevention, education and awareness developed in partnership with the Lung Health Foundation.
2. Immediately re-invest in the National Immunization Strategy for transfer payments to be made to the provinces and territories. Consider allowing provinces to use funds from the Safe Restart Agreement to invest in this key preventative health measure for the fall.
3. Ensure ongoing and sustainable funding to public health campaigns and programs- including extending the funding lifecycle for the Lung Health Foundation's Health Canada funded cannabis education campaign and youth vaping and smoking cessation program.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented attention to the importance of pandemic preparedness and public health. As countries have grappled with responding to both the public safety implications as well as the economic impacts, the pandemic continues to demonstrate the devastating effects of not taking public health seriously. It has illustrated the interconnectedness of public health and economic stability - and that economic activity can be severely disrupted by a public health shock. In this spirit, we write this submission on measures the federal government should take to restart the Canadian economy as it recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lung Health Agenda

While COVID-19 has brought attention to the importance of respiratory care, it has also shed light on significant gaps and inconsistencies across the country. With viruses like COVID-19 putting individuals with respiratory illnesses at increased risk of experiencing serious symptoms or death, now more than ever there is a need to build a comprehensive national approach to advance the respiratory health of all Canadians. The Lung Health Agenda would develop goals and strategies in the areas of health promotion and awareness, research and surveillance, and disease detection and management.

As eluded to above, challenges around disease prevention efforts are ongoing and could be addressed within the contents of this framework. In the area of research & development, there continues to be severe knowledge gaps in lung health. For example, although lung cancer is by far the largest cancer killer, it is also the least funded. Compared to others like breast and prostate, lung cancer receives a fraction of research investments. Studies have shown that when comparing the burden of certain cancers relative to research funding devoted to their cure, lung cancer was under-funded when compared to the burden it poses on society (on incidence, mortality and person-years of life lost).ⁱ While we appreciate the government's recent investments in COVID-19 research, the importance and value of research innovation in other areas such as lung cancer cannot be disregarded.

A National Lung Health Agenda would address these concerns and work to ensure appropriate levels of public spending is being dedicated to health research. Many studies have demonstrated that in the health innovation and research sector, increased public sector spending on research encourages additional private sector investments.ⁱⁱ Ensuring the Canadian Institute for Health Research and Health Canada have sufficient funding allocated towards their health research streams will be key to generating private investments, discovering breakthrough innovations, securing intellectual property within Canada and driving economic growth.

The Lung Health Foundation's national studies and reports have consistently shown inequities in access to care, quality of care, and lung health outcomes between different provinces and territories. There is an undeniable need for the federal government to facilitate collaboration as has been done for other disease states such as diabetes. The Agenda could set consistent standards in areas such as lung disease screening, treatment accessibility and affordability that would empower provinces and territories and allow them to be implemented at their discretion and within the context of their own jurisdictions.

With federal funding, the Lung Health Foundation is willing and able to work collaboratively to build out the Agenda. We have established a National Lung Health Advisory Council made up of leading Canadian medical experts in the areas of infectious disease, immunology, respiratory,

and oncology. This council could provide direction and guidance in developing the Agenda. Moreover, by mobilizing other health stakeholders including the provinces and territories and First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners, we can establish an integrated approach to the prevention, early detection and management of respiratory illnesses and ensure Canadians are protected from the devastating effects of infectious diseases.

Immunization Funding

The Lung Health Foundation has been a fierce advocate for the importance of influenza and pneumococcal vaccine uptake for protecting Canada's seniors and those with underlying medical conditions. The need to ensure uptake of these vaccines is especially pertinent this 2020/21 flu season. As budget considerations are made, the issue of vaccine uptake cannot be overlooked.

During the upcoming flu season, our healthcare system must be flexible in order to reach as many Canadians as possible with a vaccine. Canadians may be more reluctant to get vaccinated because of fears of exposing themselves to COVID-19 at their doctor's office or pharmacy. This is coupled by the fact that there is a risk of individuals being co-infected with both influenza and COVID-19 which could worsen the effects of the viruses. In addition, a potential second-wave of COVID-19 infections as well as a rise in all-cause mortality will overburden our healthcare system. Low uptake of the pneumococcal and influenza vaccines will lead to increased hospitalizations, straining healthcare system capacity.

In 2017-18, pneumonia led to 138,485 emergency department visits across Canada.ⁱⁱⁱ It was the ninth leading cause of an ER visit. Influenza contributes to an average of 12,200 hospitalizations and average of 3,500 deaths each year across Canada annually.^{iv} These numbers could increase if precautionary steps are not taken to immunize as many Canadians as possible. The federal government's role in encouraging uptake should be two-fold: First, there is a need to address vaccine hesitancy and refusal by investing in a public education campaign on the important health benefits and safety of vaccines. Second, there is not enough funding being allocated to public health, with even less going toward disease prevention. The federal government should ensure that the provinces have adequate funding to be able to offer public access to these vaccines by reinvesting in the National Immunization Strategy.

The Lung Health Foundation notes the government's plan for a safe restart to the economy's \$19 billion investment and believes that a portion of the funds could be set aside for this key public health preventative measure. For instance, British Columbia, New Brunswick, and Quebec do not publicly fund the influenza vaccine for all residents due to funding constraints. Provinces that do have universal immunization programs are still restricted in which vaccines they are able to cover. We urge the Government of Canada to find sustainable funding mechanisms for equitable and comprehensive vaccine coverage across the country.

Public Health Education & Programs

The provision of public health programs and supports, as well as public education, is fundamental to improving health-related outcomes for Canadians. It is also essential to long-term healthcare costs savings and controlling the prevalence of chronic diseases. This is particularly true in the area of lung health, where preventative behavior decreases the risks of lung disease immensely. The Lung Health Foundation has been fortunate to receive funding from Health Canada for the



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The Toker campaign materials

smoking and vaping in Canada have not subsided. In fact, COVID-19 has accentuated these challenges, with preliminary evidence demonstrating that vaping and cannabis smoking may increase the risk of more serious symptoms. The Government of Canada must ensure it is doing its best to prevent the negative health effects of engaging in cannabis, smoking, and vaping use by providing education, programs and supports to youth. These interventions will reduce disease

development and execution of two initiatives. Our “Toker” campaign is a national public education campaign which aims to reduce the lung health risks and harms associated with cannabis smoking for Canadians between the ages of 18 to 25. As Canada's experience with cannabis legalization is still in its nascency, the value of instilling strong messages about the dangers of cannabis for younger populations is of heightened importance.

Second, we administer an online youth vaping and smoking cessation program targeted at youth ages 14-19 who are interested in quitting smoking combustible tobacco cigarettes, vaping e-cigarettes, or both. Smoking is the leading cause of preventable death in Canada and most young people who smoke regularly continue to smoke throughout adulthood. While many young people want to quit, there are few services available to them. With the Conference Board of Canada establishing the cost of tobacco usage to the Canadian health system at \$6.5B annually, programs like the one we are developing begin to fill this service gap and are essential to reducing the long-term costs associated with smoking-related illness^v.

While less is known about the long-term health related consequences of e-cigarette use and cannabis smoking, emerging research is continuously showing the relationships between vaping and future cigarette use, and the lung damage that can be caused by vaping and cannabis smoking. Despite government efforts, cannabis use,

burden among this population and the corresponding costs to our health care system. The Lung Health Foundation is well- positioned to continue to build awareness and address these issues coming out of the pandemic. We are interested in continuing and augmenting our efforts in preventing young people from smoking cannabis, and aiding youth who engage in tobacco and vaping use to quit.

The Health Canada funding for our “Toker” campaign” expires this year, and the funding life cycle for our youth vaping and smoking cessation programs ends in September 2022. We hope that the renewed urgency on public health prompts you to consider continuing funding both of these efforts.

About the Lung Health Foundation

The Lung Health Foundation is Canada’s primary not-for-profit organization dedicated to the diagnosis, patient care and prevention of lung disease. As a national organization focused on the lung health of Canadians, the Lung Health Foundation invests in the future by driving groundbreaking research into respiratory infectious diseases, working closely with researchers in Canada and around the world to find ways for people with lung disease to live a higher quality of life. We are also committed to helping Canadians affected by lung disease to live fulfilling, active lives that are not inhibited by their condition. We deliver direct programs and supports to help them cope such as our Lung Health Line and patient support groups.

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