

NEWS RELEASE/COMMUNIQUE

Ontario Campaign for Action on Tobacco Campagne Ontarienne D'Action Contre le Tabac

For immediate release

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Ontario Government Flunks 2nd Annual Tobacco Control Report Card

Founding Agencies:

Canadian Cancer Society—Ontario Division
Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario
Non-Smokers' Rights Association
Ontario Lung Association
Ontario Medical Association

Supporting Agencies:

Alcohol and Drug Concerns Inc.
Association of Local Public Health Agencies
Cancer Care Ontario
Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies
Ontario Association of Naturopathic Doctors
Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations
Ontario Physical and Health Education Association
Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada
Registered Nurses Association of Ontario
The Ontario College of Family Physicians

Toronto – A coalition of health groups says the Ontario government is failing to take tobacco control seriously, and, as a result, is putting the province's citizens at risk.

Representatives of the Ontario Campaign for Action on Tobacco (OCAT) called on the Ontario government to greatly improve its standards in areas of taxation, smoke-free workplaces and public spaces, tax revenue dedicated to stop-smoking and related tobacco control programs, cost recovery legislation and a ban on retail tobacco displays, at a news conference held at Queen's Park in Toronto, today.

"Reducing tobacco use is one preventive health care strategy that guarantees positive results," commented Dr. Ted Boadway, Executive Director of Health Policy, Ontario Medical Association. "Evidence from California's state-wide control program proves that thousands of cancer, heart disease and lung cases, and deaths, can be avoided. Ontario could easily duplicate this success."

"The ingredients of a successful tobacco control program include an intensive mass media campaign, smoke-free spaces and other legislation, effective stop smoking programs and the discouragement of kids' smoking," added Dr. Anthony Graham, Chair of External Relations for the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario.

"My colleagues and I are increasingly frustrated at the province's failure to implement key recommendations of the 1999 Health Minister's Expert Panel on Renewal of the Ontario Tobacco Strategy," concluded Penny Thomsen, Executive Director of the Canadian Cancer Society - Ontario Division.

The coalition had three victims of tobacco-related illness with them at the news conference. They spoke about the debilitating effects of tobacco use on their health and their loved ones.

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OCAT made five recommendations its members said represent a minimum standard for the Ontario government to meet.

Specific recommendations include:

1. Increasing taxes by at least \$10 a carton.
2. Legislating workplaces and public places 100% smoke-free.
3. Dedicating at least \$90 million annually to a comprehensive tobacco control program.
4. Suing Canadian tobacco companies to recover health care costs.
5. Eliminating all point-of-sale displays of tobacco products.

“We called for similar changes 18 months ago in our first report card,” explained Michael Perley, Director of the Ontario Campaign for Action on Tobacco. “Had the government listened, victims of tobacco use like those with us today, as well as thousands of others, might be alive or in better health today.”

The Campaign issued its 2nd annual Report Card three years after publication of the Minister of Health’s Expert Panel Report on the Renewal of the Ontario Tobacco Strategy. The Report Card notes health agencies are at a continued impasse with the Ontario government on implementing tobacco control programs.

The Ontario Campaign for Action on Tobacco is a coalition of provincial health agencies that have been working together since the early '90s in support of the implementation of effective tobacco control policies in the province of Ontario.

The Report Card and accompanying detailed analysis is available on-line at www.ocat.org under “What’s New”.

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