

Blueprint for Ontario's new tobacco control strategy released

***New approach calls for tackling nicotine addiction epidemic
by limiting supply of tobacco products and reducing demand***

TORONTO (Oct. 19, 2010) – It's time to renew and extend Ontario's tobacco control strategy with a focused, aggressive campaign to "de-normalize" and "de-legitimize" the tobacco manufacturing industry, a new consensus report recommends.

It's time to change our approach," said Michael Perley, member of the Tobacco Strategy Advisory Group (TSAG) and Director of the Ontario Campaign for Action on Tobacco. "It's time that we no longer treat the tobacco industry as a 'normal,' legitimate business. The tobacco industry should not be considered either normal or legitimate."

The 43-page TSAG report, *Building on Our Gains, Taking Action Now: Ontario's Tobacco Control Strategy for 2011-2016*, released today, outlines a wide range of recommendations which should form the basis of the next Ontario government five-year Smoke-Free Ontario Strategy. The first Smoke-Free Ontario Strategy was launched in 2004 and the Ontario government has implemented many of its key recommendations and tobacco control policies.

"We've done a good job of protecting non-smokers from second-hand smoke and beginning to address youth protection and retail issues. Now it's time to build on those gains and address the source – the supply of and demand for tobacco products," said Perley.

The report recommends de-normalizing and de-legitimizing the tobacco industry through truthful advertising and social media communications on the industry's marketing campaigns, its products designed to lure new smokers, its focus on young smokers, and its claims that the industry is "normal" because adults make the "choice" to smoke, when the science indicates smokers are clearly addicted.

“Nicotine addiction – not lifestyle choice – is what drives people to continue smoking and what causes new smokers – most of whom are under 20 – to continue to use tobacco. This has disastrous consequences for public health and huge costs to the health care system and the larger economy,” said Dr. Hazel Lynn, TSAG member and Grey Bruce Medical Officer of Health, Council of Ontario Medical Officers of Health.

Laura Syron, TSAG member and Vice President, Research, Advocacy and Health Promotion for the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario, said smoking kills 13,000 Ontarians each year.

“Smoking is still an epidemic and the leading cause of preventable disease and death in Ontario,” said Syron. “More than two million people in Ontario still smoke, and each year thousands of youth start smoking. Now is the time to take this strategy up to the next level.”

Among its many recommendations, the report urges an end to smoking in multi-residential rental units, on all restaurant patios, within nine metres of public building doorways, and in all parks and playgrounds. It recommends restricting the type of businesses allowed to sell cigarettes and licensing those businesses that do sell tobacco products. The authors call for controls on the supply of raw manufacturing materials and more intensive enforcement to combat the contraband market, which is a major source of freely-available untaxed tobacco products in Ontario.

TSAG member Dr. Roberta Ferrence, who has studied outdoor smoking and the effects of second-hand smoke on non-smokers, said the report’s recommendations about reducing the supply of tobacco products is as important as reducing demand.

“We must do everything possible to reduce the very presence of tobacco in the consumer environment so that it is easier for non-smokers and smokers to make healthy choices,” she said.

“This is particularly important around schools and other areas where youth gather. Reducing the availability of tobacco products by reducing the number of legal outlets and the availability of contraband tobacco, is key to assisting our youth in making these choices.”

The report also calls for the Ontario government to adopt a “whole of government approach” to tobacco control that would see multiple ministries working together on the problem. It also issues a call for increased tobacco control funding, noting that US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines recommend a jurisdiction of Ontario’s size spend at least \$100 million. The province currently spends \$42.8 million on tobacco control, down from \$60 million annually in both 2007-2008 and 2008-2009.

The report’s main target is “Five Over Five,” or a decrease of 5 percentage points over the next 5 years in the proportion of Ontario smokers who quit smoking (approximately 490,000 or 23% fewer smokers).

The 25 members of TSAG, who represent a consensus of tobacco control and health experts, were co-chaired by the Assistant Deputy Minister of the Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion and Sport (which administers the Smoke-Free Ontario strategy) and the Vice-President of Science and Public Health for the Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion. The report was informed by a Scientific Advisory Committee made up of leading researchers in the field of tobacco control.

For more information or to arrange interviews with spokespersons Michael Perley, Laura Syron, Dr. Hazel Lynn, or Dr. Roberta Ferrence, please contact:

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