

# campaign for a **smoke-free** alberta

- News Release -

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## **TOBACCO SALES DECLINING AS PHARMACIES AND POST-SECONDARIES GO TOBACCO-FREE**

Tobacco sales in Alberta are declining for the second consecutive year as the result of lower than anticipated consumption, according to the provincial government's quarterly fiscal update released last month. Health groups are attributing the projected decline to the new Tobacco Reduction Act, which came into effect on January 1, 2008.

"It appears that the Tobacco Reduction Act is having the desired effect on tobacco consumption" said Angeline Webb, Cancer Control Analyst for the Canadian Cancer Society, Alberta/NWT Division. "We are delighted to see a continuing decline in tobacco sales following the implementation of effective legislation".

The total projected tobacco tax revenue for the current fiscal year is short \$50 million — down six percent from the initial budget projection. This news follows an actual five percent decline in tobacco shipments last year, following a 63 cent per pack cigarette tax increase in 2007.

The final phase of the Tobacco Reduction Act — a ban on tobacco sales in all establishments containing pharmacies (including supermarkets) and post-secondary institutions — takes effect on January 1, 2009.

"Health professionals and public institutions should not be involved with the sale and promotion of a deadly and addictive product," said Les Hagen, Executive Director of Action on Smoking & Health. "Pharmacists will no longer be required to contradict their professional code of ethics by selling tobacco products. Post-secondary institutions will no longer be facilitating the sale of tobacco products to their students and staff".

The coalition contends that the new sales restrictions will help "denormalize" tobacco industry products by further limiting the number of retail outlets, and by prohibiting sales by health professionals and public institutions. The coalition applauds all of the pharmacies and post-secondary institutions that voluntarily removed tobacco products before the legislation was approved.

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Six provinces and two territories have already prohibited tobacco sales in pharmacies including Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and Labrador, Northwest Territories and Nunavut. However, Alberta is the first western province to implement a tobacco sales ban in pharmacies.

"The Tobacco Reduction Act is world-class legislation that will have a significant impact on Alberta's quality of life for many generations to come" said Donna Hastings, Vice-President, Health and Research for the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Alberta, NWT and Nunavut. "Only a handful of jurisdictions around the world have adopted all of the measures contained within Alberta's comprehensive tobacco legislation."

"However, the government can and should go further to protect all Albertans, especially young people, from the deadly consequences of tobacco use" Hastings added. "We continue to have serious concerns about the elevated rates of smoking among Alberta teens."

Last August, Health Canada released its annual smoking survey data for 2007 revealing that 20 percent of Alberta teens aged 15 -19 continue to smoke compared with 15 percent across Canada. The coalition believes that the greater affordability of tobacco in Alberta is contributing to higher rates of teen smoking in the province.

The coalition is urging the Government of Alberta to implement a two-dollar per pack tax increase and to prohibit the sale of all flavoured tobacco products to help reduce teen smoking.

Tobacco kills an estimated 3,000 Albertans annually — representing about one in every five deaths. Tobacco is the only legal product that kills half of its users when used exactly as intended by its manufacturers.

The Campaign for a Smoke-Free Alberta is a coalition of prominent health organizations that are working together to reduce tobacco use in Alberta.

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