

campaign for a **smoke-free** alberta

- News Release -

Wednesday, November 18, 2009

HEALTH GROUPS APPLAUD PASSAGE OF BILL TO SUE TOBACCO COMPANIES

(Edmonton) A coalition of prominent health organizations is applauding the Alberta government for passing a bill that will hold tobacco companies accountable for their tremendous impact on the healthcare system.

Bill 48, the *Crown's Right of Recovery Act* allows the Alberta government to sue tobacco companies to recover the portion of healthcare costs resulting from the tobacco industry's deceptive marketing practices.

"We are delighted that the Alberta government has joined with other provinces to hold the tobacco industry accountable for the healthcare impact of its deceptive marketing practices" said Tony Hudson of The Lung Association. "The tobacco industry has an unparalleled track record of deceit, denial, and public harm resulting from decades of marketing the leading avoidable cause of premature death. This bill is a significant achievement for public health, justice and tobacco industry accountability."

Alberta is the ninth province to pass legislation to enable Medicare cost recovery lawsuits against tobacco companies. British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick have already initiated legal action against the tobacco industry to recover Medicare costs. Ontario and Quebec are suing the industry for \$50 billion and \$30 billion respectively. The New Brunswick lawsuit is led by a consortium of major law firms at virtually no cost to the government.

"The Alberta government now has a tremendous opportunity to help offset the rising costs of healthcare while holding the tobacco industry accountable for its actions" said Les Hagen of Action on Smoking & Health. "We encourage the government to initiate a lawsuit as soon as possible in a combined effort with other provinces. We also encourage the government to ensure that effective tobacco control measures are included in any deliberations during the proceedings."

In the 1990s, all 50 American states launched legal action against the tobacco industry to recover a portion of Medicare treatment costs resulting from tobacco use. In 1998, 46 states agreed to a \$250 billion out-of-court "master settlement agreement" with the industry in addition to a number of important marketing restrictions. These restrictions included a complete ban on tobacco industry sponsorships, a ban on cartoon characters such as "Joe Camel", further restrictions on youth access, and the creation of a multi-million dollar tobacco reduction fund.

Tobacco is the only legal product known to kill one half of its long term users when used as intended by its manufacturers. An estimated 3,000 Albertans die from tobacco use each year. The Campaign for a Smoke-Free Alberta is a coalition of prominent health organizations who are working to reduce tobacco use in Alberta.

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