

TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

FROM: Graham L. Pollett, MD, FRCPC  
Medical Officer of Health

DATE: 2011 April 14

---

## **CALL FOR ACTION AGAINST SMOKING IN MOVIES**

### ***Recommendation***

#### ***It is recommended:***

- 1. That the Board of Health endorse the Ontario Coalition for Smoke-free Movies policies highlighted in Appendix A to Report No. 036-11; and further,***
- 2. That the Board of Health communicate its support for policy actions to reduce the impact of smoking in movies on youth to local MPPs and other Boards of Health in Ontario.***

### **Background**

The Ontario Coalition for Smoke-Free Movies was formed in May 2010 to take collective action to counter the harmful impact of smoking in movies. Members of the Ontario Coalition for Smoke-free Movies include the Canadian Cancer Society - Ontario Division, Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario, Non-Smokers' Rights Association/Smoking and Health Action Foundation, Ontario Lung Association, Ottawa Public Health Exposé, Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada, Program Training and Consultation Centre Media Network and Ontario Tobacco Control Area Networks (TCAN). The Middlesex-London Health Unit is the host of the southwest TCAN.

Research has shown that the more youth see smoking in movies, the more likely they are to start. In 2009, Canadian theatres delivered over 1.1 billion tobacco impressions in youth-rated films alone. It is important to note that since movies are also viewed on DVD and Blue-ray, video-on-demand, cable, satellite, broadcast and broadband media, 1.1 billion underestimates the total tobacco impressions viewed in youth-rated films.

### **Immediate Action is Required**

Tobacco imagery in movies and in video games is a powerful vehicle for promoting tobacco. Since the November 1998 Master Settlement Agreement in the United States, attention has been drawn to the links between Hollywood and the Tobacco Industry, including evidence of payments for tobacco product placement in movies and industry files that show the role of movies in tobacco promotion. One letter states: "Film is better than any commercial that has been run on television or in any magazine, because the audience is totally unaware of any sponsor involvement."

Extensive research on the effects of smoking and other tobacco portrayals in films demonstrates a relationship between smoking in the movies and youth tobacco initiation. According to the Tobacco Vector Report, created by the Physicians for a Smoke-free Canada, latest research suggests 44% of the estimated 300,000 Canadian teens who smoke, first lit up because they saw a character smoking in a film (about 130,000 of youth 15-19). Since provincial rating agencies (Ontario Film Review Board) seldom apply adult ratings (18A) to top-grossing films rated "R" in the United States, Ontario children and youth are exposed to an estimated 60 percent more tobacco imagery than their US counterparts. This influence

is compounded by the fact that generally smoking is glamorized on film, and rarely are the negative health effects of using tobacco products shown.

Recent data on youth and young adult tobacco-use rates suggest that declines in tobacco use have halted. According to the 2009 Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey, 16% of youth in grades 9 to 12 in southwestern Ontario reported past year cigarette smoking, and 7.5% reported daily smoking.

### **Call for Action**

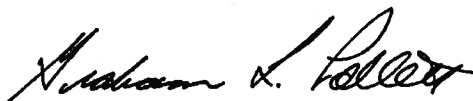
The Ontario Coalition for Smoke-Free Movies is calling for health organizations and agencies that work with children and youth to endorse the policies outlined on page two of Appendix A to reduce youth exposure to on-screen smoking and impressions of tobacco.

### **Conclusion**

Tobacco use remains the number one cause of preventable disease and death in Ontario. Smoking in movies challenges Ontario's tobacco control efforts. Tobacco imagery in movies, particularly films rated as suitable for children and adolescents, promotes tobacco use and normalizes tobacco products to youth. Endorsement of the Ontario Coalition for Smoke-free Movies policy actions would help to prevent young people from starting to use tobacco products.

The Ontario Coalition for Smoke-Free Movies encourages Board of Health members, public health professionals, parents and education leaders to visit [www.smokefreemovies.ca](http://www.smokefreemovies.ca) to learn more and contribute to this movement.

This report was prepared by Ms. Amy Yateman, Health Promoter, and Ms. Linda Stobo, Manager, Chronic Disease Prevention and Tobacco Control Team. Ms. Stobo will be present at the April 14 Board of Health meeting to answer any questions.



Graham L. Pollett, MD, FRCPC  
Medical Officer of Health

<p><b>This report addresses</b> the following requirement(s) of the Ontario Public Health Standards: Comprehensive Tobacco Control; 1, 7, 11</p>
--

## ENDORSEMENT OF ACTION ON SMOKING IN MOVIES

Tobacco use is the number one cause of preventable disease and death in Ontario. Leaders in public health units, local boards of health, non-governmental organizations and health charities in Ontario have a history of speaking out in favour of actions to reduce the harmful impact of tobacco use.

**Whereas** tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death and disability in Canada, accounting for the deaths of approximately 13,000 people in Ontario alone each year;<sup>1</sup>

**Whereas** the tobacco industry has a long, well-documented history of promoting tobacco use and particular brands on-screen, while obscuring its true purpose in doing so;<sup>2</sup>

**Whereas** adolescents watch more films than any other age group: movie-going is a universal experience and tobacco imagery in films is currently unavoidable;<sup>3</sup>

**Whereas** nearly 90 percent of tobacco impressions delivered to theatre audiences in Canada in 2009 were delivered by large US media conglomerates;<sup>3</sup>

**Whereas** Canadian movie rating systems classify more movies as 14A or PG that are rated R in the US resulting in 60% more tobacco imagery exposure by youth-rated films;<sup>3</sup>

**Whereas** exposure to smoking in movies is estimated to be responsible for 44% of youth uptake;<sup>4</sup>

**Whereas** an estimated 130,000 Canadian smokers aged 15-19 have been recruited to smoke by exposure to on-screen smoking, and 43,000 of them will eventually die of tobacco-caused diseases;<sup>3</sup>

**Whereas** the World Health Organization has advised all nations that have ratified the *Framework Convention on Tobacco Control*, a global treaty obligating Parties including Canada to prevent youth smoking and end tobacco promotion through all channels, to give an adult rating to all new films that depict smoking, whether domestically produced or imported;<sup>5</sup>

**Therefore be it resolved that** Middlesex London Board of Health (name of organization) **endorses the following policies to reduce the exposure of youth to smoking in movies:**

- (1) Rate new movies with smoking "18A" in Ontario, with the sole exceptions being when the tobacco presentation clearly and unambiguously reflects the dangers and consequences of tobacco use or is necessary to represent smoking of a real historical figure.
- (2) Require producers to certify on-screen that no one involved in the production of the movie received anything of value in consideration for using or displaying tobacco.
- (3) Require strong anti-smoking ads to be shown before any movie with tobacco use at the distributor's expense, regardless of rating and distribution channel.
- (4) Require producers to stop identifying tobacco brands.
- (5) Require that films with tobacco imagery assigned a G, PG, or 14A rating be ineligible for federal and provincial film subsidies.

Signed Patricia L Codere Date April 14, 2011

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.mhp.gov.on.ca/en/smoke-free/default.asp> Accessed August 17 2010

<sup>2</sup> C Mekemson and SA Glantz, "How the tobacco industry built its relationship with Hollywood," *Tobacco Control* 2002; 11: i81-i91. KL Lum, JR Polansky, RK Jackler, et al., *Tobacco Control* 2008; 17: 313-323.

<sup>3</sup> Polansky, J.. Tobacco Vector: How American movies, Canadian film subsidies and provincial rating practices will kill 43,000 Canadian teen alive today- and what Canadian government can do about it. Physicians for Smoke-Free Canada. July 2010. Accessed August 2010 [www.smoke-free.ca/pdf\\_1/2010/Tobaccovector.pdf](http://www.smoke-free.ca/pdf_1/2010/Tobaccovector.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> C Millett and SA Glantz, "Assigning an '18' rating to movies with tobacco imagery is essential to reduce youth smoking (editorial)," *Thorax* 2010; 65(5): 377-78

<sup>5</sup> World Health Organization, *Smoke-free movies: From evidence to action*, 2009. Accessed April 2010 [http://www.who.int/tobacco/smoke\\_free\\_movies/en/](http://www.who.int/tobacco/smoke_free_movies/en/)

## ONTARIO COALITION FOR SMOKE-FREE MOVIES

September 1, 2010

Dear colleague,

### **Re: Act now to reduce the impact of smoking in movies on youth in Ontario**

As you are aware, tobacco use is the number one cause of preventable disease and death in Ontario. The 2008 review of tobacco and media by the US National Cancer Institute (*Monograph 19*) reached an unequivocal conclusion regarding the impact of smoking in movies on youth tobacco use: "The total weight of evidence from cross-sectional, longitudinal and experimental studies indicates a causal relationship between exposure to smoking in movies and youth smoking initiation."

Researchers estimate that 44% of youth smoking can be attributed to exposure to on-screen smoking. The influence of movie smoking on young people should not be surprising, given the pervasive influence of Hollywood on popular culture and the fact that most other vehicles of tobacco promotion have been banned in Canada.

The tobacco industry's collaboration with Hollywood, including paid product placement, is well documented. The tobacco industry's own files reveal the importance of movies to tobacco promotion: "Film is better than any commercial that has been run on television or in any magazine, because the audience is totally unaware of any sponsor involvement."

The World Health Organization recommends four solutions to reduce tobacco depictions in movies. The recent report *Tobacco Vector*, commissioned by Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada, examines the importance of applying these policy solutions in Canada, as well as the role of public funding and film subsidies for youth-rated films with tobacco depictions.

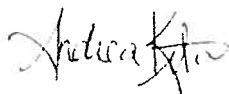
Smoking in movies undermines our collective tobacco control efforts. We encourage you to support the policy actions needed to reduce the impact of smoking in movies on youth initiation and subsequent long-term addiction to tobacco industry products. Please submit a letter of endorsement to the Ontario Coalition for Smoke-Free Movies to John Atkinson at [jatkinson@on.lung.ca](mailto:jatkinson@on.lung.ca). Endorsements are being compiled online by the Ontario Lung Association's Youth Advocacy Training Institute at [www.smokefreemovies.ca](http://www.smokefreemovies.ca).

A sample statement of endorsement is enclosed for your consideration and signature along with a summary of the evidence with references in the fact sheet *Smoking in the Movies*.

Sincerely,



Lorraine Fry  
[lfry@nsra-adnf.ca](mailto:lfry@nsra-adnf.ca)



Andrea Kita  
[andrea.kita@hamilton.ca](mailto:andrea.kita@hamilton.ca)  
Co-chairs, Ontario Coalition for Smoke-Free Movies