



TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

FROM: Dr. Christopher Mackie, Medical Officer of Health / Chief Executive Officer

DATE: 2017 November 16

MODERNIZATION OF THE SMOKE-FREE ONTARIO STRATEGY

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board of Health:

1. *Endorse the recommendations in the [“Smoke-Free Ontario Modernization: Report of the Executive Steering Committee”](#); and*
2. *Call on the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care: (a) to proceed with the creation of a renewed Smoke-Free Ontario Strategy; and (b) to commit to the proposed end-game target of reducing the prevalence of commercial tobacco use in Ontario to less than 5% by 2035.*

Key Points

- The Smoke-Free Ontario Strategy is ready for renewal, and as such the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care formed an Executive Steering Committee to provide evidence-based, actionable recommendations on how to address the burden of commercial tobacco use in Ontario.
- On October 10, 2017, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care released the Executive Steering Committee’s report: [“Smoke-Free Ontario Modernization: Report of the Executive Steering Committee.”](#)
- The report recommends that Ontario work together with the federal government to reach a proposed end-game target of reducing the prevalence of commercial tobacco use in Ontario to less than 5% by 2035.
- In order to attain the end-game targets, Ontario must strengthen existing legislation and take bold action, creating new measures to reduce the uptake of tobacco and the burden of addiction.

The Burden of Tobacco

Even though the Smoke-Free Ontario Strategy has achieved many successes since its inception in 2005, tobacco remains the leading cause of preventable disease and death in the province of Ontario. According to Public Health Ontario’s report [“Evidence to Guide Action: Comprehensive Tobacco Control in Ontario \(2016\).”](#) Ontario has the third-lowest smoking rate in Canada, yet rates have plateaued over the last few years. Not only is smoking responsible for 13,000 deaths in Ontario each year, it also accounts for \$7.5 billion in direct healthcare costs and 5.3 billion in lost income and productivity. In order to end the tobacco epidemic, Ontario must renew the Smoke-Free Ontario Strategy with a bold, innovative approach that will yield the drastic declines in smoking rates required to reduce the healthcare burden.

The End Game

Historically the term *tobacco control* has applied to the work that has been done by public health and non-governmental and government agencies to mitigate the effects of commercial tobacco use. Today, however, a new school of thought challenges this concept of tobacco “control.” The new end-game approach to tobacco control challenges us to move beyond controlling the epidemic to eradicating it completely.

In the fall of 2016, Queen's University hosted a summit of tobacco control experts to discuss a federal tobacco end-game strategy. Summit participants agreed to a target of 5% prevalence of commercial tobacco use in Canada by 2035. Subsequently, in February 2016, as the result of a consultative process, the federal Minister of Health released a consultation paper that proposed adoption of the end-game target as the goal of a new Federal Tobacco Strategy ([Report No. 028-17](#)).

Smoke-Free Ontario Modernization

The Smoke-Free Ontario Strategy was created in 2005, and has since come up for renewal. In preparation for developing a new strategy, the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care formed an Executive Steering Committee in the spring of 2017. The Committee was co-chaired by Roselle Martino, Assistant Deputy Minister for the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, and Dr. Andrew Pipe, University of Ottawa Heart Institute. Public Health was represented by Dr. Charles Gardner, Medical Officer of Health for the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit, and Dr. George Pasut, Public Health Ontario. The Committee was asked to provide evidence-based recommendations aligned with the government's strategic vision and priorities for control of tobacco and other harmful inhaled substances and products. It must be noted that alongside this process, the Minister has been working with First Nations and Indigenous communities to ensure Ontario includes appropriate actions to address the impact of commercial tobacco on the health of First Nations and Indigenous Peoples in the renewed strategy.

On October 10, 2017, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care released the Executive Committee's report: "[Smoke-Free Ontario Modernization: Report of the Executive Steering Committee](#)." The report recognizes that Ontario has been a leader in tobacco control nationally and internationally, and that significant gains have been achieved to date. However, it also states that unless bold new action is taken, we may expect that over the next two decades, at least 260,000 Ontarians will die from a tobacco-related illness. Maintaining the status quo is not an option. The Executive Steering Committee recommended that Ontario adopt the same end-game target of less than 5% smoking prevalence of commercial tobacco use by 2035, in alignment with the federal government's target.

In order to meet this end-game target, Ontario must take aggressive action to combat the tobacco epidemic and must create a comprehensive strategy that reduces harm from all inhaled substances, including shisha, cannabis, and other potentially harmful emerging products (such as heat-not-burn products and other vaped substances). To be successful, work must continue on all three pillars of tobacco control (prevention, cessation, and protection), and new work must be initiated to combat the tobacco industry. We must increase the number of Ontarians who quit smoking from 45,000 to more than 80,000 per year, and reduce the number of Ontarians who start to smoke to 10,000 per year. The report recommends that aggressive action be taken to: control the tobacco industry; enhance person-centred, barrier-free cessation services; intensify prevention and protection efforts through innovative strategies and strengthened legislation; and enhance the tobacco control system under a model of strong regional and provincial leadership. It is recommended that the Board of Health send a letter to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care urging the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to proceed with the creation of a renewed Smoke-Free Ontario Strategy with end-game targets.

In one generation – less than twenty years – Ontario could end the tobacco epidemic, resulting in billions of dollars in healthcare savings and preventing more than a quarter-million tobacco-related deaths.

This report was prepared by the Chronic Disease Prevention and Tobacco Control Team and the Southwest Tobacco Control Area Network of the Healthy Living Division



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