



INFORMATION

The Public Education Component of the Tobacco Control Initiative

Introduction

The Prevalence of Smoking in Canada

There are 6.7 million smokers in Canada. In 1996, the average Canadian smoker lit up an average of 18 cigarettes a day. While the smoking rate in Canada has decreased from 45% in 1966 to 29% in 1996, there are worrisome trends such as the increase in teen (15-19 years old) smoking, from 21% in 1990 to 29% in 1996. The 15-19 year old age group is the only one where females smoke more than males (31% female/27% male). Moreover, almost half of Canada's children live with at least one smoker. Smoking does not just affect smokers — deaths attributable to second-hand smoke outnumber those for all other regulated, environmentally hazardous substances combined.

Approaches to Smoking Cessation and Prevention

Smokers find it difficult to quit, and it takes an average of eight quit attempts, often over a period of years, to successfully give up smoking. We know that it takes a multi-faceted approach to encourage people to stop smoking and prevent them from starting in the first place. Since 90% of smokers start smoking before the age of 18, youth are an important target. Smokers and potential smokers need to be made more aware of the health impacts on themselves and those around them; tobacco use should be removed from the realm of what is considered normal social behaviour and assistance provided for those who want to quit. This is done through a variety of initiatives including public education, community outreach and advertising.

The Canadian Approach

The Canadian approach to tobacco control consists of a mix of elements involving both non-governmental organizations (NGO) and federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments. It aims to reach a large number of people in a variety of ways. Research, communications, training and community development are all key components of the Canadian tobacco strategy.

The federal government has focussed its attention on research, legislation, communications and public education. The results of its behavioural and marketing research assists the federal government in the development of media campaigns and training programs for health professionals and community organizations. Research also supports cessation initiatives. As a result of research, youth peer-led initiatives have been identified as an effective vehicle. Taxes and enforcement are also an important component of the federal approach.

Between 1994-1997, the federal government managed a comprehensive tobacco control strategy, the Tobacco Demand Reduction Strategy (TDRS). Over the three years, the government invested \$104 million in 234 community-based projects, 4 media campaigns, and 146 public education and awareness projects. The government also put in force the *Tobacco Sales to Young Persons Act* in February 1994, which prohibited the sale of tobacco products to Canadians under the age of 18. In April 1997, the *Tobacco Act* was passed, replacing the *Tobacco Sales to Young Persons Act* and the *Tobacco Products Control Act*.

The Tobacco Control Initiative

Reducing the number of smokers in Canada is identified as a long-term outcome of the *Tobacco Control Initiative* (TCI). Through the TCI, the federal government has allocated \$100 million over five years, beginning in 1997/1998, for legislation and regulations, enforcement, research and public education. Each of the components complements and reinforces the others.

TCI Public Education Component

The Public Education Component of the TCI (\$50 million over five years) aims to reduce smoking and tobacco use among Canadians, with a particular emphasis on youth. The guiding principles of the TCI include: consulting the provinces, territories and non-governmental organizations on design and implementation; and seeking partnerships with child- and youth-focussed professionals, non-governmental organizations, federal and provincial/territorial departments.

The Public Education Component has three main objectives which were developed in consultation with provincial and territorial governments and non-governmental organizations:

- to reduce tobacco-caused illness and death through prevention, protection and cessation activities, and share initiatives developed in these areas with the Canadian and international health communities;
- to ensure there is a strong, coordinated and effective national network of community, health and youth organizations dedicated to reducing smoking and tobacco use; and
- to build public concern about the tactics used by the tobacco industry to sell its products, counter positive images associated with smoking, and raise awareness of the risks associated with smoking.

TCI Projects for 1999

- The Government of Canada will continue to sponsor research about tobacco use and effective approaches to encourage people to stop smoking. The government will also look at ways to assess the marketing of tobacco.
 - A full range of communications vehicles – from advertising to Web sites – will be used. We have been looking at the examples of other governments (California, Massachusetts and Florida) that have developed and implemented comprehensive programs to reduce tobacco use and will implement some of their successful initiatives including running their advertisements in Canada where appropriate.
 - The government will also assess models for cessation support, focussing on youth cessation approaches, including the Government's Quit4Life Program (www.quit4life.com), and maternal smoking.
 - A Youth Advisory Committee will be created to involve youth in the development of Health Canada's programs and policies in the area of tobacco control; advise the government on related youth and tobacco issues; and create networking opportunities for youth and youth organizations.
 - Understanding what works and what doesn't as well as the specialized needs of particular populations will be part of a best practices and knowledge development project of the TCI. There are many domestic and international examples of tobacco reduction policies, programs, projects and strategies. Many of these have been evaluated in terms of their impact on the decision to smoke. There are opportunities and benefits in ensuring best practices are shared among national, regional and community-based organizations. We will develop and share a process for identifying best practices.
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- Work is underway to enhance training and the dissemination of information, which will facilitate the expansion of the network of Canadians involved in tobacco control.
- A learning program for girls aged 10 to 15 will focus on developing a healthy and active lifestyle as a means of supporting smoking prevention and cessation.
- We know that smokers are more likely to successfully quit if they have support. We will work with professional partners in the health community to develop means of counselling and assisting smokers as they attempt to quit.
- The tobacco clearinghouse is identifying, collecting, organizing and disseminating the information that individuals, organizations, communities and governments need in the implementation of tobacco reduction programs.
- We will focus on broadening public awareness that the sale of cigarettes to youth under 18 is illegal.

For more information, visit our web site at **www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/tobaccoreduction**

