



For Immediate Release

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The Ontario Public Health Association Supports a Renewed Ontario Government Commitment to Tobacco Control

TORONTO (October 20, 2010) It is time to shift our focus in tobacco control from encouraging non-smokers to resist temptation to smoke to halting the sale and distribution of tobacco products. “We should no longer treat the tobacco industry as a legitimate business and take action to “denormalize” and “de-legitimize” the tobacco industry”, said Liz Haugh, President of OPHA.

Today, the Tobacco Strategy Advisory Group (TSAG) released its comprehensive set of recommendations to the Ontario government in a report, *Building on Our Gains, Taking Action Now: Ontario’s Tobacco Control Strategy for 2011 – 2016*. “We have made tremendous gains in tobacco control over the past five years through the 2004 Smoke-Free Ontario Strategy but there are still 2.1 million smokers in Ontario and each year thousands of youth start smoking and become addicted. It is clear we need to take additional actions to reduce the leading cause of preventable disease and death in Ontario – the use of tobacco products,” said Carol Timmings, Past President of OPHA and Member of TSAG.

The comprehensive Tobacco Control Strategy includes a number of recommendations which were informed by leading researchers in tobacco control. It builds on the Smoke-Free Ontario Strategy, calls for measures to reduce both the supply and demand for all tobacco products, and takes a “whole of government” approach.

Carol Timmings, also indicated that, “more needs to be done to reduce the very presence of tobacco in the consumer environment to make it easier for smokers and non-smokers alike to make healthy decision. This is particularly important around schools and places where youth congregate.”

Among the actions recommended to reduce the supply of tobacco products, the report calls for:

- A move toward a system of designated retail sales outlets to reduce the number of tobacco retailers
- Plain packaging inside and outside except for government- approved health warnings
- A ban on flavoured tobacco products
- Divestment of government holding of tobacco investments
- Restriction on tobacco industry lobbying
- Establishment of minimum retail price and increase tobacco taxes
- Marking of tobacco products with tax-paid markings so that they can be distinguished from contraband
- Fund anti-contraband public education and mobilize police and other enforcement officers to assist with contraband control
- Work to increase control of tobacco farming

Recommended actions to reduce demand for tobacco include:

- Implement media and social marketing strategies to change social norms and mobilize youth through peer to peer approaches.
- Implement ads that denormalize tobacco companies and decrease social norms.
- Cover smoking cessation medications through the Ontario Drug Plan and increase availability of non-prescription cessation medications at the retail level.
- Mobilize health care professionals to ask, advise and assist smokers to quit.
- Amend the Smoke-Free Ontario Act and Regulation to eliminate smoking of tobacco in all restaurant and bar patios, hotels, all doorways and entrances and playgrounds.
- Increase fines for non-compliance.
- Ban smoking in multi-residential retail units.
- Tax credits to developers of new affordable housing who commit to designate the development as 100 % smoke-free.

“We are calling on the government to quickly begin taking action on the reports recommendations to reduce tremendous burden of illness due to tobacco use. The payoffs to tobacco control are clear. The use of tobacco products costs Ontario taxpayers \$1.6 billion/year in direct health care costs. The cost of implementing this comprehensive strategy will only be a fraction of that cost,” said Liz Haugh.