



PRESS RELEASE

**Quebec anti-tobacco coalition denounces federal government decision  
abolishing First Nations and Inuit tobacco control program**

**Monday October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2006** — *“The federal government’s decision to leave First Nations and Inuit communities without an anti-tobacco program is both deplorable and inexcusable”,* states the **Québec Coalition for Tobacco Control**.

Last week, without consulting stakeholders, the government abolished the **First Nations and Inuit Tobacco Control Strategy**. This \$10.8 million cut came in spite of data showing that aboriginal Canadians are three times more likely to smoke than the Canadian average. In some aboriginal communities, as many as 80% of the population smokes.

According to **Louis Gauvin, coordinator of the Quebec Coalition**, *“Treasury Board President John Baird claimed he was cutting the strategy because it wasn’t working. Apparently this government believes that if a health problem is massive and difficult to solve quickly, we should simply ignore it and stop investing money to find better solutions – particularly if the problem affects First Nations communities.”*

At the same time as the **First Nations and Inuit** program was cancelled, a formal assessment of the first five years of the program was being carried out. *“The government did not do any homework in order to properly judge the program’s effectiveness. It did not wait for the results of the evaluation. It did not consult stakeholders. It did not consider possible successful outcomes, such as Nunavut’s and the North-west Territories’ strict anti-tobacco legislation, nor the decline in tobacco consumption among First Nations communities between 1997 and 2002 (from 62% to 59%). And they did not take into account the fact that success in tobacco control is not always measured in months or years, but rather in decades,”* insisted **Mr. Gauvin**.

The **Federal Tobacco Control Strategy**, announced in April 2001, was supposed to provide \$480 million in funding over five years, including \$50 million specifically for **First Nations and Inuit**. Funding has repeatedly been slashed over the years at every level (especially the mass media component). The portion reserved for **First Nations and Inuit** has also been drastically cut.

*“If there is no alternative to immediately replace the program and make use of all the committed individuals currently working to reduce aboriginal smoking, Mr. Baird’s vague promises to replace the program at an unspecified date have absolutely no value. Abolishing the program without a replacement means throwing away all the expertise and commitment accumulated over the last few years. This is a remarkably cavalier way to deal with the health of nearly a million Canadians. You can’t leave the aboriginal communities with a one, or two, or three year funding and programme gap while this new initiative is being developed. We’re dealing with a public health crisis, and crises demand urgent action.”*

*“Tobacco remains the number one cause of preventable death among Canadians; and the problem is even more severe among the aboriginal population. Just because some of the program’s components should be improved, this isn’t a reason to end it. Let’s find ways to make it more efficient.”* concluded **Mr. Gauvin**.