

CANADIAN COALITION FOR ACTION ON TOBACCO COALITION CANADIENNE POUR L'ACTION SUR LE TABAC

World Exchange Plaza, 111 Albert Street, Unit 108, Box 8114, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1P 1A0
World Exchange Plaza, 111 rue Albert, Unité 108, Case postale 8114, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1P 1A0

Press release

Protecting children should be Senate's priority Health groups call for passage of Bill C-32 before potential election call.

OTTAWA-- Canada's major health organizations are calling on the Senate of Canada to give priority to the passage of Bill C-32 (Cracking Down on Tobacco Marketing Aimed at Youth Act). The legislation would stop tobacco companies from using fruit, candy and other flavourings in cigarettes and cigarillos and would ban tobacco ads in publications that can be viewed by youth. C-32 was introduced in the House of Commons by Minister of Health Leona Aglukkaq to implement a commitment made by Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

"Canada's doctors are calling on Senators to pass Bill C-32 quickly," said Dr. Anne Doig, President of the Canadian Medical Association. "Skyrocketing use of flavoured tobacco products is a significant new threat to the health of young Canadians."

Over the past half decade, tobacco companies have developed flavoured cigarillos as a new category of tobacco products and have exploited loopholes in federal tobacco laws to sell these products without the health warnings, minimum package size or other requirements imposed on cigarettes. Health Canada surveys show that one in three high school aged Canadians (aged 15-19) have used these products and that sales of these products have increased more than 900% in six years.

Sally Brown, CEO of the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada explained that the speed with which these products have reached young people has alarmed health regulators across Canada. "We thought we had successfully protected many children from experimenting with cigarettes only to find that they were caught by the marketers of these colourful novelty products." She urged Senators to give priority to putting C-32 into force. "Every month this bill is delayed puts the health of the 200,000 Canadian children who use these products at greater risk."

"Senators should consider that these gimmicky products act as a gateway drug to lifelong tobacco use," said Cynthia Callard, Executive Director of Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada. "The candy flavouring, the colourful packaging, the cheap price and the mistaken belief that these are not as harmful as cigarettes all combine to successfully tempt young people to experiment with smoking. For many, this experiment will prove fatal." Canadian researchers have found that symptoms of tobacco addiction are seen in young people after only a very few smoking experiences.

...../2

"Not surprisingly, the tobacco industry is working furiously to delay or defeat this legislation, and is engaging in classic industry disinformation campaigns" said Rob Cunningham, a lawyer, and Senior Policy Analyst for the Canadian Cancer Society. Cunningham, author of a book examining the history of Canadian tobacco industry, pointed to several past threats of companies to retaliate to stronger tobacco laws.

He explained that the campaign against C-32 launched by Philip Morris International in Washington D.C. is another familiar tactic used by that company to forestall improvements to tobacco laws. "Once again we are seeing trade agreements thrown up in a bogus attempt to raise confusion and doubt about the responsibility of Canada's government to protect the health of young Canadians in a hope to delay passage of this bill." Philip Morris has previously made similar claims when attempting, ultimately unsuccessfully, to block Canada from adopting pictorial health warnings and from ending the use of the terms 'light' and 'mild' on cigarette packaging.

"Philip Morris claims that C-32 will ban burley tobacco in Canada, raise trade issues and harm U.S. farmers are all entirely false," added Cunningham. "The fact that U.S. burley exports to Canada are negligible - and in some years so low as to be non-reportable or barely reportable - means that Philip Morris is manufacturing a trade concern when none exists. There is no burley tobacco trade issue with the U.S. None."

"The importance and urgency of this issue is reflected in the priority it has received from the highest levels of government and the broad support of the health community," explained Robert Walsh, executive director of the Canadian Council for Tobacco Control. In the two years since the evidence became available of the extent to which these products had successfully targeted young Canadians, several legislative and regulatory proposals have been forwarded to address them, including a 2008 election commitment by Prime Minister Harper, and Liberal and NDP private member's bills in provincial and federal parliaments. Bill C-32 received unanimous support in the House of Commons.

"We are calling on Canada's Senators to endorse the urgent desire of their colleagues and communities across Canada to see this legislation in place as soon as possible," emphasized Melodie Tilson, Director of Policy with the Non-Smokers' Rights Association.

The Canadian Coalition for Action on Tobacco is a national coalition of health organizations. Members supporting this initiative include: the Canadian Cancer Society, the Canadian Council for Tobacco Control, the Canadian Dental Association, , the Canadian Medical Association, Coalition québécoise pour le contrôle du tabac, the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada, the Non-Smokers' Rights Association, and Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada.

- 30 -

For further information:

Canadian Cancer Society: Rob Cunningham (613) 565-2522 x 305

Canadian Council for Tobacco Control: Rob Walsh (613) 567-3050 x 107

Canadian Dental Association: Basia Vanderveen, (613) 523-1770

Canadian Medical Association: Lucie Boileau (613) 731-8610 x 1266

Coalition québécoise pour le contrôle du tabac: Flory Doucas (514) 598-5533

Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada: Eileen Melnick McCarthy (613) 569-4361, x 318

Non-Smokers' Rights Association: Melodie Tilson (613) 230-4211 x 3