

## Tobacco control groups applaud Quebec's efforts to replace Philip Morris as a major shareholder of Medicago

### Governments urged to adopt WHO treaty guidelines to prevent similar debacles

**Edmonton, Ottawa, Montreal, June 20, 2022** — Canadian health groups are applauding efforts by the **Quebec** government to replace **Philip Morris** as a major shareholder in order to comply with **Canada's** obligations under the **World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC)**. The public health treaty compels member countries to sever ties with tobacco companies. The **Canadian government** was defying the treaty by collaborating with **Philip Morris** in the development of the **Medicago** vaccine.

The **Quebec** government's **Minister of Economy and Innovation, Pierre Fitzgibbon**, is quoted in [media reports](#) as saying that the **Quebec** government is actively looking to offer **Medicago's** investors a buyout of **Philip Morris** shares in the company.

*"Philip Morris's involvement in Medicago is the main obstacle to widespread international distribution of the plant-based Covid-19 vaccine. Medicago has previously signalled that alternative investors would help facilitate this outcome. Quebec's intentions to buyout Philip Morris's shares from Medicago is the logical path to the eventual approval for this vaccine by the World Health Organization,"* says **Flory Doucas**, **spokesperson for the Quebec Coalition for Tobacco Control**.

**Quebec** showed similar leadership in the past when it provided transitional funding in early 2000s to farmers facilitating the implementation of the tobacco sponsorship ban, and shortly after that when it paid farmers to retire their tobacco farming equipment. *"It would be unethical to tackle the Covid pandemic by helping Big Tobacco in its efforts to maintain the tobacco epidemic,"* adds **Ms. Doucas**. *"The control of one pandemic does not justify the enabling of another"*.

*"If this kind of disturbing government collaboration with Big Tobacco can happen in Canada, which is considered a world leader in tobacco control, it can happen anywhere"* says **Les Hagen of Action on Smoking & Health**. *"The Framework Convention for Tobacco Control obligates member nations to avoid all collaborations and partnerships with tobacco companies. This requirement is a cornerstone of the treaty since it protects governments from tobacco industry interference. Tobacco companies should not be dictating public health policy and the treaty shields governments from industry manipulation and exploitation. Indeed, tobacco industry interference remains the number one obstacle to the implementation of the tobacco control treaty. It is crucial that governments put up their shields against both tobacco company lobbying and corporate whitewashing schemes that aim to enhance their political and social influence"*.

### **National and provincial guidelines are needed to prevent industry interference**

As they have [in the past](#), health groups are stressing the need for the federal and provincial governments to adopt and disseminate their own guidelines to prevent tobacco industry interference to ensure full

compliance with the [international treaty](#). *“The Medicago debacle should serve as a warning for all jurisdictions, and prompt them to take the necessary steps to ensure full compliance with the letter and spirit of the FCTC,”* adds **Ms. Doucas**. *“Indeed, Medicago is a case study on how the tobacco industry continues to exploit any opportunity to pursue its so-called ‘corporate social responsibility’ schemes aimed at whitewashing all the death and suffering it has caused.”*

Article 5.3 of the [WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control](#) obliges parties to ensure that their policies are protected “from commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry.” [Guidelines](#) for implementing this obligation make clear that “the tobacco industry should not be a partner in any initiative linked to setting or implementing public health policies, given that its interests are in direct conflict with the goals of public health.” Parties are directed that they “should not endorse, support, form partnerships with or participate in activities of the tobacco industry described as socially responsible.”

Earlier this year, [health groups supported](#) the **World Health Organization’s** refusal to approve **Medicago’s** COVID-19 vaccine because of the pharmaceutical company's ties to the tobacco industry. *“Tobacco industry products kill more than eight million people annually, including more than 50,000 in Canada. The tobacco industry is the main vector of diseases caused by smoking and continues to vigorously fight against effective tobacco control measures. It is imperative to counter the influence of Big Tobacco by preventing them from positioning themselves as ‘partners’ of governments, particularly on public health issues,”* explains **Cynthia Callard, Executive Director of Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada**.

Years have passed since **Health Canada** [gave assurance](#) that “due consideration” would be given to developing guidelines for use by federal and provincial officials to ensure that **Canada’s** obligations to protect health policies from industry influence were met against the intrusion of tobacco companies into healthcare and public health.

*“Unfortunately, Canada’s delay in putting up proper shields against tobacco industry influence led to public funds being invested in the Philip Morris vaccine collaboration. Canadian governments should prioritize the development of guidelines to prevent tobacco industry interference and make all political decision-makers aware of the power and influence of this rogue industry,”* adds **Les Hagen**.

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#### **Contact**

Les Hagen: 780-919-5546

Flory Doucas: 514-515-6780