

On this World No Tobacco Day, it's time to call for a No-Tobacco Canada

Ottawa, Montreal, Edmonton, May 29, 2023 – On the occasion of **World No Tobacco Day 2023**, tobacco control organizations are calling on governments to use the historic opportunity of tobacco manufacturers' facing bankruptcy and concentrate their efforts at winding up commercial tobacco companies in **Canada**. They urge governments to recognize that a monetary settlement that allows Big Tobacco to maintain operations is not an appropriate resolution for the longstanding wrongdoing of this industry.

"For over three years provincial governments have been secretly negotiating with tobacco companies in an attempt to recover \$500 billion in health care costs caused by the wrongful behaviour of the companies in the past century," explained **Michael DeRosenroll, Vice-President of Action on Smoking & Health (ASH)**. "It's past time these governments focused instead on preventing future harms and addiction by forcing the phase-out of the commercial tobacco industry."

Settlement discussions were triggered in March 2019 when Canada's biggest tobacco companies sought protection under the federal *Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act*. After the **Quebec Court of Appeal** upheld a \$15 billion judgment against them, the companies claimed they were facing bankruptcy if provincial government lawsuits also went to trial. The corporate behaviour condemned by the **Quebec** courts included failure to warn, misleading advertising, causing harm and infringing on human rights.

"No financial restitution will ever be sufficient, possible or appropriate for this historic wrongdoing," said **Flory Doucas, spokesperson for the Quebec Coalition for Tobacco Control**. "The \$500 billion claimed by the provinces will not restore the lives of those killed by these commercial products and won't prevent future victims. Full repayment is unrealistic because with their current level of profits it would take tobacco companies more than 200 years to repay the costs of treating those who were harmed. Allowing the companies to continue their nefarious operations in order to finance even a fraction of such payments will only result in more addiction, disease and death."

The antitobacco groups are concerned that some who stand to benefit from such an approach are promoting the view that a financial settlement with some modest health measures tacked on will be a public health victory. Their concern echoes a [2021 poll](#) shows that half of Canadians (51%) think it is more important for governments to use these lawsuits to phase out tobacco use rather than to receive a cash settlement (11%).

Dr. Atul Kapur, President of Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada cautioned against any settlement with the industry that allocates some money to health programs but which is otherwise predicated on continuing tobacco sales. "While such window dressing may seem attractive, it cannot disguise the inherent injustice of making future smokers foot the bill while allowing this deadly trade to continue."

"Canada can learn from the United States, where this approach was adopted 25 years ago without resulting in meaningful structural change to the tobacco market," he added.

"Governments should use their power as litigants to strengthen their ability as legislators to protect the health of their communities," said **Dr. Kapur**. "It's time to pull the plug on discussions centered on money and to focus instead on imposing an orderly and rapid phasing out of this harmful commercial activity. A medically-supervised supply of nicotine can be provided to those who remain addicted by this industry's products."