



## News release

# While Quebec's Order of Pharmacists and British Columbia have intervened to protect kids from easy access to nicotine pouches, the federal government has yet to restrict their sale and promotion nationally

**Montreal, February 9, 2024** – The **Quebec Coalition for Tobacco Control** applauds the leadership of the **Quebec Order of Pharmacists** as well as that of the **Government of British Columbia** for having acted promptly and appropriately to protect young people against the ill-advised authorization that enabled **Imperial Tobacco** to irresponsibly sell and promote nicotine pouches. These products are addictive and can be especially harmful to young people [whose brains](#) are still developing.

That said, *“it’s crucial for the federal Health Minister to urgently intervene to protect young people across the country from the easy access to nicotine pouches for recreational use and from the almost unrestricted marketing which [presents their use](#) as an attractive, social and fashionable lifestyle,”* says **Flory Doucas, Co-Director and Spokesperson for the Coalition**.

Last November, in light of [disturbing online and point-of-sale advertisements](#) for flavored nicotine pouches sold by **Imperial Tobacco**, several health and anti-tobacco groups [sounded the alarm](#) regarding their July 2023 authorization by **Health Canada** as a [natural health product for use in smoking cessation](#). As a result, these nicotine pouches can be sold across the country to children of all ages and the rules relating to their promotion are so poorly adapted to Big Tobacco’s historical practices that **Imperial Tobacco** can advertise them on television, on billboards, in social media, [as has been widely documented](#). Until recently, only **Quebec**’ framework limited the sale of nicotine pouches to pharmacies.

In addition, on January 24, the **Quebec Order of Pharmacists** [called on Quebec](#) pharmacists to keep nicotine pouches [behind the counter](#), requiring a consultation with the pharmacist before they could be purchased. Indeed, the **Order** explained to its members that, given their apparent popularity with minors and the dangers associated with their over-the-counter sale, *“the risks of misuse are high, and we urge you to be extremely vigilant.”* [Our translation]

On Wednesday, **British Columbia Premier David Eby** and **Health Minister Adrian Dix** [announced](#) that the sale of nicotine pouches will be restricted to pharmacies in that province, and that they will need to be placed behind the counter. As in **Quebec**, this will reduce the ease of access for minors and other customers that wish to use them for recreational purposes.

**Imperial Tobacco** [can claim](#) all it wants that these pouches are intended for smokers who want to quit... However, this same company deliberately chose to market these products with tempting flavors like “tropical breeze”, to present them in trendy, multicolored packaging and to distribute them through convenience stores across the country (except in **Quebec** and now **British Columbia**, which limit their sale to pharmacies).

In fact, [a new study](#) published four days ago in **BMJ Global Health** concludes that the introduction of new nicotine products such as e-cigarettes and nicotine pouches is regarded by tobacco multinationals (including **British American Tobacco**, parent company of **Imperial Tobacco**) as “key to the survival” of an industry operating in an unfriendly

political and social climate. Indeed, through these products, it would appear that the industry is seeking to reposition itself as a supplier of “clean” nicotine while maintaining and increasing sales of combustible cigarettes wherever possible.

In other words, according to the researchers, the marketing of **Imperial Tobacco**'s nicotine pouches is part of « *the transition to continuing the tobacco epidemic in declining mature markets using pharmaceutical-style nicotine products to sustain nicotine addiction, sanctioning partnership with scientists and regulators and distracting from ongoing cigarette sales in developing markets* ».

#### **What's the federal government waiting for?**

*“While it's encouraging to see federal health minister Mark Holland support British Columbia's decision to restrict the sale of nicotine pouches and reiterating his concerns about their marketing, he has yet to use the levers at his disposal to counter the broader problem across Canada.”* Indeed, the **Minister** could use his powers under the [Natural Health Products Regulations](#) to suspend, at least temporarily (section 18), the license of these products to force the company to limit its sales to pharmacies and give federal, provincial and territorial authorities time to adapt the various laws and regulations.

*“Haven't they learnt anything from the youth vaping epidemic that resulted from the wholly inadequate federal legal framework for e-cigarettes?”* asks **Ms. Doucas**.

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