

News Release

Tobacco-control groups applaud plans for decisive actions announced today by Health Minister Mark Holland aimed at limiting flavours, restricting promotion and suspending over-the-counter sales of kid-friendly nicotine pouches

“Stay the Hell away from our kids” – Mark Holland

Montreal, March 20, 2024 - The **Quebec Coalition for Tobacco Control, Physicians for a Smoke Free Canada** and **ASH-Canada** commend **Minister Mark Holland’s** unequivocal understanding of **Big Tobacco’s *modus operandi*** with respect to recruiting new addicts for profit and applauds his announcement seeking decisive action regarding **Imperial Tobacco’s** shameless marketing of flavoured kid-friendly **Zonnic** nicotine pouches.

More specifically, the **Minister said** he is seeking the authority to limit their flavouring to essential flavours only, to restrict their marketing to fit with their intended purpose of smoking cessation, and to confine their sale “behind the counter” presumably in pharmacies, as **Quebec pharmacists** and the **Government of British-Columbia** have already done.

“Today’s announcement aims to implement measures that would effectively end the sale of nicotine pouches with kid-friendly flavours, prevent their commercial retail sale through corner stores, and ensure they are only marketed as cessation products,” says **Cynthia Callard, Executive Director of Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada.**

*“Given the minister’s strong words, we are optimistic that the government intends on protecting today’s youth as well as the next generation of young people from new nicotine products and the addiction risks they poses to **brains that are still developing**. We will closely monitor the situation and hope to see concrete progress in the coming weeks,”* adds **Flory Doucas, Co-Director and spokesperson for the Quebec Coalition.** *“We are also delighted with Minister Holland’s bold statements regarding the predatory nature of the tobacco industry and his explicit warning to ‘be there’ should the industry attempt to exploit similar loopholes.”*

The announcement follows the recent decisions of the **Quebec Order of Pharmacists** and the **British Columbia government** to restrict the sale of nicotine pouches to pharmacies, i.e. behind the counter, in such a way as to require consultation with the pharmacist before purchase. The **Coalition** and many others have stated that it is urgent to extend such protection to all young people in Canada and further to limit their promotion across the board, promotion which currently remains virtually unrestricted.

“The Minister’s action is entirely justified, in particular to prevent the recreational use of nicotine products by non-smokers, especially young people. Imperial Tobacco’s irresponsible promotion of nicotine pouches as a ‘lifestyle’ for attractive young adults in trendy social contexts set its pouches apart from other pharmaceutical cessation therapies. However, given the global corporate attempt to expand the commercial nicotine market, a broader precautionary framework for all nicotine products would be welcome,” adds **Ms. Callard.**

*“Like other groups with corporate interests, Imperial Tobacco **can claim** all it wants that its pouches are aimed at smokers who want to quit. However, the cigarette maker has deliberately chosen to wrap its pouches in*

multicoloured packaging, offer them with kid-friendly flavours, distribute them through convenience stores and promote them with lifestyle messaging and images that feature young attractive adults," reminds **Ms Doucas**.

Time to tackle youth nicotine vaping

"We hope the minister's tough words are followed by tough action. In fact, now that the Minister understands the importance to prevent the unrestricted commercial sale of nicotine pouches, we hope we can count on him to apply the same sense of urgency to the youth vaping epidemic. Indeed, the inadequate federal rules surrounding vaping products remain in place while the proposed restrictions on flavors in vaping liquids, first introduced in 2021, remain weak and have yet to be finalized," concludes **Les Hagen, Executive Director of ASH-Canada**.

- 30 -

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