



News Release

Quebec Coalition welcomes new rules aimed at preventing industry marketing of nicotine replacement therapies (NRT) that hook young people

Montréal, August 23, 2024 — The **Quebec Coalition for Tobacco Control** applauds the [Ministerial Order](#) announced yesterday by the **federal government** which spells out the list of concrete measures that will tighten up the rules on the sale, flavours and promotion of novel nicotine replacement cessation therapies (NRT) in order to prevent underhanded corporate strategies, like the marketing of “Zonnic” nicotine pouches by Canadian cigarette-maker **Imperial Tobacco**.

In summary, the new framework will:

- Require NRTs in new and emerging formats, such as nicotine pouches, to be sold only by a pharmacist or an individual working under the supervision of a pharmacist, and to be kept behind the pharmacy counter.
- Prohibit NRTs in new and emerging formats, such as nicotine pouches, from being sold with flavours other than mint or menthol.
- Prohibit advertising or promotion, including labelling and packaging, that could be appealing to youth.
- Require a front of package nicotine addiction warning, as well as a clear indication of the intended use as a smoking cessation aid for adults trying to quit smoking.
- Require manufacturers to submit mock-ups of labels and packages for any new or amended NRT licenses to ensure there is no youth appeal.

“Ever since [Imperial Tobacco](#) was caught marketing a natural health product licensed for smoking cessation in a way that made it appealing to young people – that is, [by using](#) images of hip young adults in social settings, catchy slogans and exotic flavors – it became urgent for government to tighten up the rules surrounding nicotine replacement therapies,” explains **Flory Doucas, co-director and spokesperson for the Quebec Coalition for Tobacco Control**.

Minister Holland’s leadership

“Today, it’s clear that Health Minister Mark Holland has delivered on his earlier commitment to do so. While we’ve been calling for these measures since last November, we recognize that these new rules have been developed in record time, especially compared to those related to the tobacco and vaping files. All too often, actions fail to follow words with respect to major policy announcements. However, Minister Holland has shown true leadership with respect to this problem, by firmly and publicly [expressing his grave concerns](#) and by pushing the government apparatus to proceed swiftly with the implementation of corrective actions. The measures announced yesterday not only appear to address the current problem, but they may also prevent similar debacles in the future,” adds **Ms. Doucas**.

The introduction of "Zonnic" onto the Canadian market last fall was a game-changer and created favorable opportunities for similar products on the illicit market. Not only has the tobacco industry launched a vast promotional strategy that incorporates all the devious practices of the past to lure young people into smoking, but it has changed [the framing of nicotine](#), touting its benefits instead of treating it as an addictive drug that is generally useless outside of the context of smoking cessation.

“Unfortunately, after about a year on the market, the rise in popularity of nicotine pouches among young people has become an entrenched problem. The measures announced today will help Quebec pharmacists and health professionals to better protect young people from these products, but additional measures will undoubtedly prove necessary, given [the ease with which](#) young non-smokers still report obtaining these products in pharmacies. For example, authorities should examine the relevance of requiring minors to obtain a prescription or to have followed some form of counselling with a cessation specialist,” adds Ms. Doucas.

It is important to acknowledge that the ministerial order was made possible thanks to the support of the **Bloc Québécois** which recognized the urgency to act and last June approved the new powers granted to the **Minister of Health** through the [Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on April 16, 2024 \(C-69\)](#). Indeed, **Bloc MP Gabriel Ste-Marie** voted in committee in favour of **Section 31** of **Bill C-69**, which amends the **Food and Drugs Act** to allow the **Minister of Health** to “establish rules for the purpose of preventing, managing or controlling the risk of injury to health from the use of therapeutic products, other than the intended use”.

History of NRT framework

Over-the-counter nicotine replacement therapies (like nicotine gum, patches, lozenges and inhalers) have long been recognized as safe options to help many smokers quit. Historically, these products were approved and regulated as medicines. But following decades of sales without serious adverse harm, **Health Canada** relaxed the rules for some products which would henceforth fall under the [Natural Health Products Regulations](#). The generally responsible marketing by companies selling these nicotine replacement therapies kept them from being attractive to young people even though they were relatively easily accessible (although not in convenience stores in Québec).

The sale of nicotine pouches in **Quebec** is restricted to pharmacies. The **Quebec Order of Pharmacists** also implemented a rule to keep them behind the counter. However, there are not parallel restrictions on packaging, flavours or promotion, which render the federal restrictions extremely relevant for the province. In addition, given illegal online sales in **Quebec** from other provinces, the **Coalition** [has called on the federal government](#) to take further steps to better regulate and enforce the sale of the full range of nicotine products.

“With the swift implementation of the listed measures, it’s obvious that the federal government held strong against the massive lobbying from businesses that profit from the sale of these pouches and has likely succeeded in taking the wind out of the sails of the tobacco multinationals who were exploiting the less restrictive rules for natural health products to create a new on-ramp to nicotine addiction – NOT an off-ramp.”

That said, *“We hope Minister Holland will now push his government to ban similarly insidious corporate practices related to vaping products which are harming youth across the country – by finally banning vaping flavors nationwide,”* concludes **Ms. Doucas**.