



COALITION QUÉBÉCOISE
POUR LE CONTRÔLE DU TABAC

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Farewell Neil Collishaw

Montreal (Quebec), October 15, 2024 — It is with great sadness that we share the news of Neil Collishaw's passing at the age of 77 from bladder cancer. Since 2000, Neil had been Research Director at Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada, alongside his professional partner, Director Cynthia Callard, who remains with the organization.

Principled, well meaning and humble

No words can do justice to the extent of Neil's integrity and honor. In addition to having a charismatic and positive personality, Neil's humility and kindness made anyone, and everyone, feel at ease and open to dialogue.

A hero in the global fight against tobacco

Neil is undoubtedly one of the world's greatest tobacco control heroes. For two decades he worked at Health Canada as its senior public servant on the tobacco file. Along with a small number of other colleagues of vision and conviction, Neil paved the way for a true comprehensive approach to tobacco control – adding “legislation” to the traditional “prevention, protection and cessation”. For two years, Neil worked with the parliamentary health committee, leading to Canada enacting its first tobacco control legislation: the 1988 Tobacco Products Control Act – TPCA. Noticing the pioneering work that had been achieved in Canada tackling tobacco industry practices, Neil was recruited by the World Health Organization at the end of the 1990s to replicate this approach around the world, starting with knowledge and capacity building in former Eastern block and then followed by the development of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. After being pushed aside before the treaty was finalized (by none other than the person who would head Philip Morris' *Foundation for a Smoke-Free World*), he came back to Canada to join Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada where he was able to pursue his important contributions both in Canada and internationally.

Throughout his career, Neil has been an invaluable advisor and expert public health witness in numerous litigation cases pitting governments and victims against tobacco companies. In many respects, Neil has played a vital role in conveying the science to the masses. For example, he's



Neil Collishaw (1946-2024)
Research Director of Physicians
for a Smoke-Free Canada and
chief architect of the WHO
Framework Convention on
Tobacco Control

been one of the strongest voices on the need for governments to raise awareness regarding the link between smoking and breast cancer.

Boundless dedication

Neil announced his diagnosis to friends and colleagues over a year and a half ago. Shortly afterwards, he sent to his public health partners a **manifesto** in the hope of inspiring the tobacco control community to ramp up its efforts against the tobacco industry's new generation of nicotine products: electronic cigarettes.

Part of the manifesto reads:

“I have often thought that I could retire once the nicotine addiction problem was solved. While nicotine addiction has abated somewhat, the problem has not been solved, and I am running out of time. ...

“To truly end the tobacco and vaping epidemics, we have to attack the tobacco and vaping industries and we have to win. If we are to deal with this venomous creature, chasing tails will no longer suffice. We have to cut off the head of the snake. ...

“Public health advocates around the world need step up their game to create that public outcry. ... To end the tobacco and nicotine epidemics, we need to attack the very heart of the tobacco and vaping industries.

“My time and ability to contribute to such an effort are coming to an end. I ask you – please – to take up this fight. The time to act is now. Do not let these industry-caused tobacco and vaping epidemics continue.”



Unbeknownst to most Canadians, the country as a whole has benefited from the work and integrity of this man whose unwavering concern for the public's interest embodied the fight against the deadliest consumer product in history. True to his determination, he won several unprecedented victories against the murderous goliaths that are tobacco manufacturers.

Neil's intelligence was matched only by his devotion to the cause, and his kindness only by his good humour. Through our roles at the Quebec Coalition for Tobacco Control, we have been honoured and privileged to have frequently interacted with this great man, both professionally and personally.

Farewell, dearest Neil, you will remain in our hearts and memories forever...

Heidi Rathjen and Flory Doucas

Neil's daughters have created a website to pay tribute to him, featuring his life story, his professional achievements and his fondest memories with family, friends and colleagues. Anyone who knew Neil can contribute:

