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Letter to the editor:

The cost of tobacco use in BC is estimated to exceed \$2.3 billion annually, according to *The Costs of Substance Abuse in Canada 2002* report, released in March 2006. The figures include direct costs, such as hospital stays, specialized treatment and fires and indirect costs, such as lost productivity. At a time when the provincial government is identifying ways to contain costs for health care, the benefits of tobacco control activities outweigh the costs.

In March, the government took a step in the right direction by making it harder for youth to purchase cigarettes from retailers and for closing administrative loopholes in the *Tobacco Sales Act*. However, there is much to be done. A private member's bill to ban the sale of tobacco products in pharmacies was recently introduced in the Legislature. The provincial government should put partisan politics aside and support this bill that has received broad-based support from pharmacists and the public.

Another positive step would be to put in place legislation that fully protects all workers in the hospitality sector from exposure to second-hand smoke. Currently, over 400 establishments have designated smoking rooms where workers must make a choice about whether to endanger their health by working in a smoky environment because the provincial government has allowed this to happen. Yet no other sector of workers in BC has to choose between their job and their health. We should catch up with the other nine provinces and territories in Canada that fully protect the public and workers from second-hand smoke.

At a time when so much evidence exists to enact good public health policy, it is puzzling why the provincial government seems to drag its feet on evidence-based tobacco control policy.

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