

COMMUNITY RELEASE

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Local Champion for Social Change Celebrated

*The Lung Association & Heart and Stroke Foundation honour **Prince George's Leonard Ward** for his contribution and commitment to reducing the harms of tobacco use.*

An elder with the Stellat'en First Nation in Fraser Lake, Leonard Ward is one of 10 BC individuals and organizations being recognized as a 2013 Champion for Tobacco-Free Living by the BC Lung Association and the Heart and Stroke Foundation (BC & Yukon).

The awards, launched for the first time this year, recognize efforts to reduce the harmful effects of tobacco and will be presented during National Non-Smoking Week, January 20 to 26, 2013. (See [here](#) a full list of 2013 award winners).

Scott McDonald, CEO of the BC Lung Association, cites Leonard's contribution to the development and implementation of BC's first ever Aboriginal Tobacco Control Strategy and his continued leadership on the issue of the sacred ceremonial versus recreational misuse of tobacco as reasons for the award.

According to non-aboriginal colleagues who collaborated with Leonard on BC's Aboriginal Tobacco Control Strategy, Leonard possesses an innate wisdom, humility and graciousness. Well known for facilitating workshops, organizing vision quests and conducting ceremonies as requested by individuals or organizations, Leonard imparts his wisdom not only within BC aboriginal communities but helps build cross-cultural understanding between aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples.

Diego Marchese, CEO, Heart and Stroke Foundation (BC & Yukon) says, "Leonard plays a very important role as an elder and leader on health issues not only within BC's aboriginal community, but for all of us working to better understand aboriginal perspectives on health and healing."

Leonard Ward's story

An elder with the Stellat'en First Nation in Fraser Lake (near Prince George), Leonard is sought out for the work he does in taking care of the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of people. His knowledge as a spiritual healer, as well as his personal experience with tobacco addiction, make him a trusted and respected resource for BC's aboriginal community, which has disproportionately high smoking rates.

"There are many stories which describe how we use tobacco for spiritual purposes and many forewarn us of the illness and suffering that will happen if we misuse it," says Leonard. "I used to smoke and misuse tobacco, so I speak from a place of understanding when I share these stories."

Leonard learned from the Elders in his family and other Elders in various parts of the country. He uses this lifelong knowledge in traditional counselling and methods of healing. He often works with people using a combination of herbs, ceremony and prayer, and has worked as a Drug and Alcohol Counsellor and Community Developer for years.

“Our approach is a holistic one. We treat the whole person, not just their smoking addiction. We try to help them become proud of who they are and where they come from,” says Leonard. “To become healthier one must learn to respect oneself, one’s environment and one’s culture– to care for one’s personal and community health as a whole.”

Champion for Tobacco-Free Living Awards

Winners of the Champion for Tobacco-Free Living Awards are chosen by the BC Lung Association and the Heart and Stroke Foundation (BC & Yukon) for their long-term contribution to clearing the air of second-hand smoke, helping people quit smoking and encouraging British Columbians to stay tobacco-free. Nominees are selected by BC community members, public health staff and health care professionals. Launched in 2013, the awards will be announced annually during January National Non-Smoking Week.

Scott McDonald, CEO, BC Lung Association

“Recent headlines have many thinking the most pressing public health concerns are obesity, lack of physical activity or perhaps illegal drug use. All are important. However, the leading cause of preventable death in British Columbia is tobacco-related illness. It is with the help of champions like Leonard Ward that we continue to make progress on this important health issue.”

Diego Marchese, CEO, Heart and Stroke Foundation (BC & Yukon)

“These awards are not only about recognizing the great work that is being done to promote tobacco reduction; they are also about sharing ideas and inspiring others to take action. Actions to reduce tobacco use and exposure to second-hand tobacco smoke are amongst the most important measures available to increase overall public health.”

About the Heart and Stroke Foundation

The Heart and Stroke Foundation (heartandstroke.ca), a volunteer-based health charity, leads in eliminating heart disease and stroke and reducing their impact through the advancement of research and its application, the promotion of healthy living, and advocacy.

About the BC Lung Association

The BC Lung Association (bc.lung.ca), a non-profit, non-governmental organization, is dedicated to improving lung health and promoting clean air initiatives across the province. Through public awareness campaigns, the Association acts as an educational resource for the general public as well as those living with respiratory conditions. The BC Lung Association also specializes in patient support programs, community services and advanced medical research.

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