

Make BC pharmacies tobacco-free urge leading BC health advocates

BACKGROUNDER

The BC Lung Association and Heart and Stroke Foundation, BC and Yukon -- joined by The Canadian Cancer Society BC & Yukon Division, the College of Pharmacists of British Columbia and the BC Medical Association -- are calling upon the BC Government to ban tobacco from pharmacy shelves. A ban on selling tobacco in pharmacies is good public health policy that will contribute to saving lives, reducing illness, and containing health care costs.

Key Messages

- Tobacco products are the leading cause of preventable disease and death in Canada. They should not be sold in pharmacies.
- Pharmacies have been granted exclusive control over the dispensing of many medications and are part of the health care system.
- Only British Columbia, Manitoba and the Yukon still allow tobacco sales in pharmacies. The 10 other Canadian provinces/ territories have already banned the sale of tobacco products in pharmacies.
 1. Ontario (as of December 31, 1994)
 2. New Brunswick (as of July 1, 1997)
 3. Quebec (as of June 19, 1998)
 4. Nova Scotia (as of January 1, 2000)
 5. Nunavut (as of February 1, 2004)
 6. Newfoundland & Labrador (as of January 1, 2005)
 7. Prince Edward Island (as of January 1, 2006)
 8. Northwest Territories (as of January 21, 2007)
 9. Alberta (as of January 1, 2009)
 10. Saskatchewan (as of April 1, 2011)
- Of 1,024 BC stores with retail pharmacies surveyed by the BC Lung Association and the Heart and Stroke Foundation between December, 2009 and January 10, 2012 - 41 percent said they sold tobacco products, 55 percent said they did not sell tobacco products and 4 percent did not answer.
- The majority of pharmacies still selling cigarettes belong to major pharmacy chains. Pharmacy chains are big business. They promote their health-care role in their advertising—yet few of the chains have voluntarily stopped selling cigarettes. It's contradictory for a healthcare business to profit from the sale of cigarettes.

Myths about tobacco-free pharmacies

Myth #1: The prevalence of smoking is not related to the availability of cigarettes

- Tobacco's pervasiveness in retail settings normalizes use and cues smoking urges among former smokers and those attempting cessation. The more places people can buy cigarettes, the more people will smoke them.
- Studies show an association between greater tobacco outlet density, higher likelihood of youth smokingⁱ and higher overall smoking prevalenceⁱⁱ.
- Convenience influences where Canadians buy cigarettes: in a national survey, one-third of respondents, especially those aged 18 to 34, said if they had to travel further to buy cigarettes they would smoke lessⁱⁱⁱ.

Myth #2: The ban of tobacco product sales will result in economic loss

- Tobacco product sales represent a small proportion of total sales. Retailer margin on the sale of cigarettes is only approximately 4 percent on the dollar^{iv}.

Myth #3: The sale of tobacco products in pharmacies helps expose smokers to quit smoking tools

- There is no evidence that pharmacies which sell tobacco do so in ways which contribute to helping smokers quit, or to preventing smoking among youth.

Myth #4: The BC College of Pharmacists should implement the ban itself

- The BC College of Pharmacists has no authority to make restrictions on ownership or types of products sold in pharmacies. Non-pharmacists own chain store pharmacies.

Myth #5: Government shouldn't tell pharmacy owners what to do

- Pharmacies are guided by province-wide legislation, standards and licensing in order to protect patients. Their goal is the same as that of the province's health system: to put patients first.

ⁱ Novak SP, Reardon SF, Raudenbush SW, Buka SL. *Retail tobacco outlet density and youth cigarette smoking: a propensity-modeling approach*. American Journal of Public Health 2006;96:670-676.

ⁱⁱ Peterson NA, Lowe JB, Reid RJ. *Tobacco outlet density, cigarette smoking prevalence, and demographics at the county level of analysis*.

ⁱⁱⁱ Health Canada, 2005. *National baseline survey on the tobacco retail environment*. Final report POR-04-48. Corporate Research Associates Inc. Prepared for Health Canada, March 2005.

^{iv} Perry, D. *The case for creating tobacco-free pharmacies in British Columbia*. Reported prepared for The College of Pharmacists of British Columbia. Updated September, 2009.