



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Make BC Pharmacies Tobacco-Free Urge Leading BC Health Advocates**

#### *Cigarettes and Pharmacies Don't Mix*

**Vancouver, BC** - Leading health advocates, the BC Lung Association and the Heart and Stroke Foundation, want the BC government to ban the sale of tobacco products in pharmacies and stores that contain pharmacies. They believe 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.

"Pharmacies and tobacco sales are incompatible," said Scott McDonald, CEO of the BC Lung Association. "People go to their neighborhood pharmacies to buy products to stay healthy and to get better when they're sick, not to buy toxic, disease-causing products that kill. It's not right for a healthcare business to profit from the sale of cigarettes, the leading cause of preventable death in Canada today."

"Ten other Canadian provinces or territories have already banned the sale of tobacco products in pharmacies. We're calling on the BC government to catch up," said Diego Marchese, CEO, BC & Yukon, of the Heart and Stroke Foundation. "Given the government's new tobacco cessation program that helps smokers quit by subsidizing the costs of various treatments sold in pharmacies, it is counterintuitive that they would also continue to allow the sale of cigarettes in pharmacies."

The BC Lung Association and Heart and Stroke Foundation are joined by the Canadian Cancer Society BC & Yukon Division, the College of Pharmacists of British Columbia and the BC Medical Association – who agree the sale of tobacco products in BC pharmacies and stores that contain pharmacies should be banned.

"There are approximately 1,000 retail pharmacies in BC. Many pharmacist-owned and operated stores have already made the laudable decision not to sell cigarettes. Unfortunately, this accounts for just over half of the pharmacies in BC," said Marchese. "The others, primarily larger chain stores, have not yet made the commitment to stop selling cigarettes."

McDonald added, "Imposing a ban on tobacco sales in pharmacies would remove another 425 retail pharmacies that currently sell tobacco from the list of about 5,700 tobacco retailers in BC. This would be a good start to reforming tobacco retailing, which is an area that clearly is in need of address."

"Pharmacists are among the most accessible of all health care professionals. They play an important role in helping people maintain and improve their health. I've never met a pharmacist who *wanted* to sell cigarettes – conversely pharmacists are more interested in helping people quit. It is the corporations that pharmacists work for who seem more concerned with profits than with doing the right thing," McDonald continued.

According to a recent BC Stats survey, clear majority - 71 percent - of British Columbians support the ban of tobacco sales in pharmacies. Furthermore, the selling of tobacco products is almost universally opposed by pharmacists themselves.

Marchese concluded, "We'd like to see the BC government ban tobacco from pharmacy shelves so these healthcare professionals can focus on their core business of dispensing healthcare products and advice. This is a sound strategy to reduce the burden of future healthcare costs caused by smoking-related illness. And, it will help British Columbians live longer, healthier lives."

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