

- News Release -

Wednesday, September 7, 2011

SMOKING RATES AMONG ALBERTA YOUTH INCREASE SHARPLY IN 2010

Smoking rates among Alberta youth shot up dramatically in 2010 according to the Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey (CTUMS) that was released this morning by Health Canada. The percentage of regular smokers aged 15-19 increased from 12% in 2009 to 17% in 2010—representing a 40% relative increase in youth smoking.

“These results are shocking and deserve the full attention of the Alberta government and health organizations” said Les Hagen, executive director. “We need to redouble our efforts to reduce youth smoking before this annual increase becomes a long-term trend. Alberta can do more to reduce smoking among adolescents and to protect them from the deadly and addictive consequences of tobacco use. Alberta youth deserve first-class protection from tobacco industry products.”

The CTUMS results also reveal that overall smoking rates among Albertans aged 15 and over are up from 18% in 2009 to 19% in 2010, while smoking rates among Canadians aged 15 and dropped from 18% in 2009 to 17% in 2010. British Columbia continues to have the lowest smoking rate in Canada with only 14% of its residents aged 15 and over smoking in 2010.

“This is the first increase in overall smoking rates in Alberta in five years—following consecutive declines in 2007, 2008 and 2009” Hagen added. “Alberta implemented several tobacco control measures between 2007 and 2009 but did not take any meaningful policy action in 2010. These results tell us that we need to keep our foot on the pedal to keep driving down tobacco use in Alberta”.

The Campaign for a Smoke-Free Alberta is currently polling political party leaders and leadership candidates for their support of several policy measures to reduce youth smoking rates including:

- Reducing youth affordability with higher tobacco taxes
- Clamping down on tobacco sales to minors
- Banning candy flavourings in all tobacco products
- Making vehicles with children smoke-free
- Holding the tobacco industry accountable
- Investing in smoking prevention and cessation programs

The results of the leadership candidate surveys can be viewed at www.smokefreealberta.com.

“We urge the Alberta government to take immediate action to reduce youth smoking starting with a significant tax increase on tobacco products” said Hagen. “Tobacco taxes are the single most effective means of reducing tobacco use, especially among adolescents. Alberta’s tobacco taxes are the third lowest in Canada and an increase is long overdue. Experience tells us that tobacco taxes reduce youth smoking.”

In 2002, the Alberta government increased cigarette taxes by \$2.25 per pack of 25—the largest such increase in Canadian history. The following year, overall tobacco sales dropped by 24% and smoking rates among youth aged 15-19 dropped from 19% to 15%.

Tobacco is the leading avoidable cause of disease and premature death in Alberta, claiming 3,000 lives annually. There are about 40,000 youth smokers aged 15-19 in Alberta.

ASH is western Canada’s leading tobacco control organization.

The CTUMS results can be viewed at:

http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/tobac-tabac/research-recherche/stat/ctums-esutc_2010-eng.php

CONTACT:

Les Hagen @ 780-919-5546