

## **ASH NEWS RELEASE**

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### **CIGARETTE CONSUMPTION IN ALBERTA 49 PERCENT HIGHER THAN B.C.'s - ASH CALLS FOR IMMEDIATE GOVERNMENT ACTION**

ASH has obtained data from Alberta Revenue and Health Canada showing that per-capita cigarette consumption among Albertans aged 15 and over was 49 percent higher than in British Columbia in 1999. The numbers also reveal that total sales of cigarettes and cigarette equivalents were higher in Alberta than in British Columbia in 1999, even though Alberta has one million fewer residents than its neighboring province.

On average, every Albertan aged 15 years and over purchased 2,107 cigarettes and equivalents in 1999 compared with 1,412 in British Columbia. Tobacco companies sold 4.91 billion cigarettes and equivalents in Alberta in 1999 compared with 4.63 billion in British Columbia during the same period.

"These numbers are shocking and the situation warrants immediate government action", said Dr. Roger Hodkinson, honorary chairman. "We cannot stand by and allow tobacco companies to undermine the health of Albertans", he added. "We will all pay dearly for these high rates of consumption when the resulting disease trends catch up. The Alberta government simply cannot afford to overlook this problem." "British Columbia has taken concerted action to reduce tobacco use and its efforts are paying off", said Les Hagen, executive director. "B.C.'s cigarette taxes are eight dollars per carton higher than Alberta's and the province has passed legislation to control tobacco sales and marketing and to ban smoking in workplaces and public areas", he added. "We should not take a back seat to B.C. on this important health issue. There is no need to protect an out-of-province industry whose products kill 3,400 Albertans each year", Hagen emphasized.

Alberta Health and Wellness Minister, Gary Mar, has proposed that the government adopt a comprehensive, evidence-based tobacco reduction strategy. An announcement is expected in the near future pending an upcoming decision by the Alberta government.

ASH is Western Canada's leading health organization devoted solely to tobacco control and prevention.

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