

ASH NEWS RELEASE

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ASH CELEBRATES 25 YEARS OF SUCCESS IN TOBACCO CONTROL

Edmonton - Last night, Action on Smoking & Health (ASH) celebrated its 25th anniversary at the Westin Hotel in conjunction with its annual general meeting.

Founded in 1979, ASH is one of Canada's longest serving tobacco control organizations and it has become a national leader in the fight for a tobacco-free society.

ASH is credited with launching the tobacco control movement in Western Canada at a time when the cause did not enjoy much public support. In 1979, smoking was allowed almost everywhere and Canadian tobacco consumption was more than twice as high as it is today. Cigarettes were less than \$2.00 per pack and there were no meaningful restrictions on tobacco sales or advertising.

"As a cigarette slogan says, we've come a long way in the past 25 years" said Dr. Roger Hodkinson, honorary chairman. "It wasn't too long ago that smoking was allowed in planes, retail shops, sports facilities and even doctor's offices" Hodkinson added. "These gains have not come easily and ASH can take much of the credit for the progress that has been made in our part of the world. Our organization has been at the forefront of the tobacco control movement in Canada and we take pride in our achievements to date."

Dr. Hodkinson received a lifetime achievement award at last night's celebration for his contribution to the cause and for transforming the organization from a small band of volunteers into Western Canada's leading tobacco control organization. He has earned national recognition for his understanding of the politics of tobacco and the need to challenge governments and tobacco companies head-on to achieve results.

Roger Hodkinson is a local pathologist and biotech entrepreneur who became involved with ASH in the early 1980s after answering a small ad in a community newspaper calling for volunteers for a new nonsmoker's rights group known then as GASP.

During Dr. Hodkinson's tenure, ASH's list of achievements include:

- ⚡ The passage of dozens of municipal smoking bylaws in Alberta and beyond.
- ⚡ Contributing to the passage of several provincial and federal tobacco control laws.
- ⚡ Helping to fend off provincial tobacco tax rollbacks in Western Canada.
- ⚡ Helping to secure the world's largest tobacco tax increase ever recorded followed by the largest annual decline in tobacco consumption in Canadian history.
- ⚡ Launching Canada's first human rights complaint on the basis of secondhand smoke exposure.
- ⚡ Advocating successfully for several provincial and federal tobacco tax increases.
- ⚡ Helping to obtain the highest per-capita investment in tobacco control in Canada (the Alberta Tobacco Reduction Strategy).
- ⚡ Establishing the first full-time tobacco control office in Western Canada.

Despite the progress that has been made, tobacco remains the leading avoidable cause of disease, disability and premature death in Canada and ASH plans to continue to work towards a tobacco-free society.

"We cannot rest on our laurels and allow the tobacco industry to recruit another generation of new customers", said Les Hagen, executive director. "ASH will continue to fight the good fight until tobacco no longer represents public health enemy number one".

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