

**Board of Health Briefing Note
Action on Smoking in Movies**

SUMMARY and RECOMMENDATION

Movies are one of the last places where tobacco use can be promoted and continues to provide misleading and positive messages about smoking for young people. With such clear evidence of the impact of on-screen tobacco use on youth smoking rates, the Ontario Coalition for Smoke Free Movies has been working with Ontario MPP's to introduce legislation to reduce the exposure of young people to smoking in movies.

Recommendation

- That the Leeds, Grenville & Lanark District Board of Health endorses the Ontario Coalition for Smoke-Free Movies' recommended action on smoking in movies.
 - (1) Rate new movies with smoking "18A" in Ontario, with the sole exceptions being when the tobacco presentation clearly and unambiguously reflects the dangers and consequences of tobacco use or is necessary to represent smoking of a real historical figure.
 - (2) Require producers to certify on-screen that no one involved in the production of the movie received anything of value in consideration for using or displaying tobacco.
 - (3) Require strong anti-smoking ads to be shown before any movie with tobacco use at the distributor's expense, regardless of rating and distribution channel.
 - (4) Require producers to stop identifying tobacco brands.
 - (5) Require that films with tobacco imagery assigned a G, PG, or 14A rating be ineligible for federal and provincial film subsidies.

BACKGROUND

Tobacco use is the number one cause of preventable disease and death in Ontario.¹ Movies are one of the last places where tobacco use can be promoted and continues to provide misleading and positive messages about smoking. From 2004-2014, 56% of top grossing movies featured tobacco. Of the movies with tobacco content, 86% were youth-rated in Ontario.

A significant amount of research examining the prevalence of smoking in movies and its impact on youth smoking has shown a causal relationship between exposure to smoking in movies and youth starting to smoke.² Currently in Ontario, movie ratings are based on coarse language, nudity, violence and sexual content. With such clear evidence of the impact of on-screen tobacco use on youth smoking rates, it is important to include smoking as a rating classification criterion. It is projected that an adult rating (18A) for smoking in movies released in Ontario would avert at least 95,000 Ontario children and teens from becoming smokers, prevent more than 30,000 future tobacco deaths, and save more than a half a billion dollars in tobacco related healthcare costs.²

COMMENTS

This topic has wide-spread support in Ontario and an 18A rating for on-screen smoking has already been supported by alPHa. Locally, parent education events have been well-received and youth and young adults are engaged in helping to prevent future smoking influences for children. Last October, petition signatures in support of an 18A rating for on-screen smoking were delivered to MPP Steve Clark by Alexis Wharton, a local young adult advocate. Mr. Clark read the petition at Queen's Park and joined over 17 other MPPs from all three parties who have read and supported the petition in our provincial legislature. The Ontario coalition for Smoke Free Movies feels we are very close to achieving this change and having public health units unite with this endorsement would greatly contribute to moving the issue forward.

Movie companies are very protective of the lucrative youth market. This rating change would not mean that more movies will be rated for adults, but rather that fewer movies would contain smoking. Production companies will use the rating systems to inform content and would have the option of not including tobacco use at all – or editing those scenes from the movie prior to release in Canada, in order to preserve the valuable youth market for films.

This is an important issue in the US as well, and they hope to have an R rating requirement in place this year regarding tobacco use. The rating system in the US is more restrictive in general and many R rated films in the US receive youth ratings in Canada. For this reason it is also very important to enact this rating change in Ontario to protect our children and youth from being exposed to on-screen tobacco marketing.

Respectfully submitted by:

Elaine Murkin, Manager Healthy Living and Development

Rebecca Shams, Health Promoter, Tobacco Program

April 19, 2018

¹The Conference Board of Canada. The Costs of Tobacco Use in Canada, 2012, October 16, 2017

²Luk R, Schwartz R. Youth Exposure to Tobacco in Movies in Ontario, Canada: 2004-2014. OTRU Special Report. Toronto, ON: Ontario Tobacco Research Unit, September 2015.



ONTARIO COALITION FOR SMOKE FREE MOVIES

Dear colleague,

Re: Act now to reduce the impact of smoking in movies on youth in Ontario

As you are aware, tobacco use is the number one cause of preventable disease and death in Ontario. A significant amount of research examining the prevalence of smoking in movies and its impact on youth smoking has shown a causal relationship between exposure to smoking in movies and youth starting to smoke.

The history of the tobacco industry's collaboration with Hollywood to promote smoking in movies, including payment for the placement of tobacco products in movies, is well documented. According to the tobacco industry, "Film is better than any commercial that has been run on television or in any magazine, because the audience is totally unaware of any sponsor involvement." Today, tobacco use in films remains widespread. In Ontario, between 2004-2014, 86% of new movies released with tobacco were youth-rated, much higher than in the US (54%)

The influence of smoking in movies on young people should not be surprising, given the pervasive influence of Hollywood on popular culture and the fact that most other vehicles of tobacco promotion have been banned, especially in Canada.

The World Health Organization recommends five solutions to reduce tobacco depictions in movies. The 2010 report *Tobacco Vector*, commissioned by Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada, examines the importance of applying these policy solutions in Canada, as well as the role of public funding and film subsidies for youth-rated films with tobacco depictions.

Smoking in movies undermines our collective tobacco control efforts. We encourage you to support the policy actions needed to reduce the impact of smoking in movies on youth initiation and subsequent long-term addiction to tobacco industry products.

Please submit a letter of endorsement to the Ontario Coalition for Smoke-Free Movies Attn: Eric Pegolo at epegolo@hungontario.ca. Endorsements are compiled online at <http://smokefreemovies.ca/letters-of-support/>.

A sample statement of endorsement is enclosed for your consideration for signature along with a summary of the evidence with references in the fact sheet *Impact of Smoking in Movies on Children & Youth*.

Sincerely,


Lorraine Fry
lfry@nsra-adnf.ca


Andrea Kita
Andrea.Kita@hamilton.ca

Co-chairs, Ontario Coalition for Smoke-Free Movies

Ontario Coalition for Smoke Free Movies is endorsed by: Algoma Public Health, Association of Local Public Health Agencies, Brant County Health Unit, Canadian Cancer Society Ontario Division, Chatham-Kent Public Health Unit, City of Hamilton Public Health Services, Community Health Nurses Initiatives Group, Dr. C. Greensmith, Medical Officer of Health County of Lambton, Eastern Ontario Health Unit, Elgin St. Thomas Public Health, Grey Bruce Public Health Unit, Haldimand Norfolk Health Unit, Halton Council on Smoking or Health, Heart & Stroke Foundation Ontario, Huron County Health Unit, Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox & Addington Public Health, Leave The Pack Behind, Middlesex-London Board of Health, Niagara Region Health Unit, Non-Smoker's Rights Foundation, North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit, Ontario Campaign for Action on Tobacco, Ontario Physical and Health Education Association, Ontario Lung Association, Ontario Public Health Association, OPHA Children's Marketing Workgroup, Ottawa Public Health, Oxford County Public Health, Parkdale Community Information Centre, Pediatricians Alliance of Ontario, Perth District Health Unit, Peterborough County-City Health Unit, Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada, Region of Peel Public Health, Region of Waterloo Public Health Unit, Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit, Sudbury & District Health Unit, The Regional Municipality of Halton, Registered Nurses Association of Ontario, Timiskaming Public Health Unit, Toronto Public Health, Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health & Windsor-Essex County Health Unit.

ENDORSEMENT OF ACTION ON SMOKING IN MOVIES

Tobacco use is the number one cause of preventable disease and death in Ontario. Leaders in public health units, local boards of health, non-governmental organizations and health charities in Ontario have a history of speaking out in favour of actions to reduce the harmful impact of tobacco use.

Whereas tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death and disability in Canada, accounting for the deaths of approximately 13,000 people in Ontario alone each year;¹

Whereas the tobacco industry has a long, well-documented history of promoting tobacco use and particular brands on-screen, while obscuring its true purpose in doing so;²

Whereas adolescents watch more films than any other age group: movie-going is a universal experience and tobacco imagery in films is currently unavoidable;³

Whereas nearly 90 percent of tobacco impressions delivered to theatre audiences in Canada in 2009 were delivered by large US media conglomerates;³

Whereas Canadian movie rating systems classify more movies as 14A or PG that are rated R in the US resulting in 60% more tobacco imagery exposure by youth-rated films;³

Whereas exposure to smoking in movies is estimated to be responsible for 44% of youth uptake;⁴

Whereas an estimated 130,000 Canadian smokers aged 15-19 have been recruited to smoke by exposure to on-screen smoking, and 43,000 of them will eventually die of tobacco-caused diseases;³

Whereas the World Health Organization has advised all nations that have ratified the *Framework Convention on Tobacco Control*, a global treaty obligating Parties including Canada to prevent youth smoking and end tobacco promotion through all channels, to give an adult rating to all new films that depict smoking, whether domestically produced or imported;⁵

Therefore be it resolved that _____ insert name of organization _____ endorses the following policies to reduce the exposure of youth to smoking in movies:

- (1) Rate new movies with smoking "18A" in Ontario, with the sole exceptions being when the tobacco presentation clearly and unambiguously reflects the dangers and consequences of tobacco use or is necessary to represent smoking of a real historical figure.
- (2) Require producers to certify on-screen that no one involved in the production of the movie received anything of value in consideration for using or displaying tobacco.
- (3) Require strong anti-smoking ads to be shown before any movie with tobacco use at the distributor's expense, regardless of rating and distribution channel.
- (4) Require producers to stop identifying tobacco brands.
- (5) Require that films with tobacco imagery assigned a G, PG, or 14A rating be ineligible for federal and provincial film subsidies.

Signed _____ Date _____

¹ <http://www.mhp.gov.on.ca/en/smoke-free/default.asp> Accessed August 17 2010

² C Mekenson and SA Glantz, "How the tobacco industry built its relationship with Hollywood," *Tobacco Control* 2002; 11: 181-191. KL Lum, JR Polansky, RK Jackler, et al., *Tobacco Control* 2008; 17: 313-323.

³ Polansky, J., Tobacco Vector: How American movies, Canadian film subsidies and provincial rating practices will kill 43,000 Canadian teen alive today- and what

Canadian government can do about it. Physicians for Smoke-Free Canada, July 2010. Accessed August 2010 www.smoke-free.ca/pdf_1/2010/Tobaccovector.pdf

⁴ C Millatt and SA Glantz, "Assigning an '18' rating to movies with tobacco imagery is essential to reduce youth smoking (editorial)," *Thorax* 2010; 65(5):377-78

⁵ World Health Organization, *Smoke-free movies: From evidence to action*, 2009. Accessed April 2010 <http://www.who.int/tobacc>