

INTRODUCTION

Tobacco control in Canada is a public health success story. Over the past four and a half decades, there has been a substantial drop in smoking across the country: about half of Canadians smoked in 1965, compared to fewer than 2 out of 10 in 2011ⁱ. While tobacco use continues to be a leading preventable cause of death in Canada, major progress has been made. In Nunavut however, the picture looks quite different. Nunavut has not enjoyed the reductions in smoking that other jurisdictions have experienced. Our territory's smoking rate currently stands at 54.3% - triple the national averageⁱⁱ. This disparity has far-reaching impacts on the health, social, and economic well-being of Nunavummiut.

Tobacco use is a driving force behind almost all of the major causes of illness and death in Nunavut. Smoking is almost exclusively responsible for the territory's high rates of lung cancer, the leading cancer in the territory. Lung cancer accounted for 33% of all reported cancer cases between 1999 and 2010. During this time frame there were 236 cases (104 female, 132 male). The incidence in Nunavut far exceeds national averages. Lung cancer is difficult to detect early and hard to treat once diagnosed. Between 1999 and 2008, 62% of Nunavummiut diagnosed with lung cancer died within one year.ⁱⁱⁱ

Tobacco is also a major contributing factor for many other types of common cancers, as well as circulatory issues such as heart attacks and strokes. It contributes to the high incidence of Tuberculosis in the territory. Second-hand smoke has been linked to poor health outcomes in pregnancy, including low birth weight, premature birth, and high rates of respiratory infection in infants and children. In these ways, tobacco is affecting healthy child development and is having a negative impact on the next generation of Nunavummiut.

In pure dollar figures, the burden of tobacco use in Nunavut is enormous. In 2012-13, Nunavummiut spent over \$48 million on tobacco products. In addition to these direct out-of-pocket expenses, illness and death caused by tobacco reduces families' income security and increases health care costs. The incalculable personal costs for Nunavummiut are lost potential and reduced quality of life resulting from lowered health outcomes and shorter life expectancy.

In order to fulfill the Government of Nunavut (GN) Department of Health's mandate "to promote, protect and enhance the health and well-being of all Nunavummiut" there is cause for intensive work towards closing the gap in smoking rates between Nunavut and the rest of Canada. In recent years the Department has taken the following steps towards realizing this goal:

- On October 28, 2011 the *Nunavut Tobacco Reduction Framework for Action 2011-2016* was tabled in the Legislative Assembly. This five year plan outlines a clear, coordinated path forward to address tobacco use and its devastating health effects in our territory.
- In January 2013, the Department received approval on its comprehensive Implementation Plan which details timelines and the specific initiatives that will be undertaken to realize the Framework for Action by 2016.
- In 2012-13 three years of funding was approved, beginning April 1, 2013, for the implementation of the *Nunavut Tobacco Reduction Framework for Action* and will flow from revenue generated by the passage of Bill 35 – An Act to Amend the Tobacco Tax Act, which increased taxation on tobacco products. A total budget of \$7.5 million over three years (2013-

2016) has been made available through hypothecated territorial tax revenue towards the implementation of the Framework.

The *Tobacco Control Act Annual Report 2012-13* documents the progress to date on implementation of the *Tobacco Control Act* – a key area of tobacco control in the *Nunavut Tobacco Reduction Framework for Action*. Strong, enforced legislation has a demonstrated impact on tobacco use and is a primary tool for tobacco control employed by the other provinces and territories that have successfully lowered their smoking rates.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE TOBACCO CONTROL ACT

The *Tobacco Control Act* was passed by the Government of Nunavut and came into force in February 2004. The two main purposes of the *Tobacco Control Act* are:

- To reduce access to tobacco products, especially to young people, through restrictions on the display and sale of tobacco products; and
- To promote and protect the health of Nunavummiut by ensuring that public places and workplaces are smoke free.

In 2007, regulations to support the *Tobacco Control Act* came into effect.

A requirement of the *Tobacco Control Act* is the preparation of an annual report on the operation of the Act:

Annual report of Chief Medical Health Officer

23. (1) *The Chief Medical Health Officer shall prepare an annual report on the operation of this Act and submit it to the Minister in accordance with Part IX of the Financial Administration Act.*

Legislative Assembly

(2) *Every report submitted under subsection (1) shall be laid before the Legislative Assembly at the earliest possible time after it is received by the Minister.*

This report covers the period of **April 1st, 2012 to March 31, 2013**.

CURRENT STATUS OF TOBACCO CONTROL ACT OPERATIONS

Since coming into force in 2004, the GN has relied on the public's voluntary compliance with the *Tobacco Control Act*. The absence of formal monitoring and enforcement of the Act has been of concern to the office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health (CMOH), as noted in every annual report since 2007. Lack of funding and human resources have been the reasons behind the Department of Health's inaction on this issue.

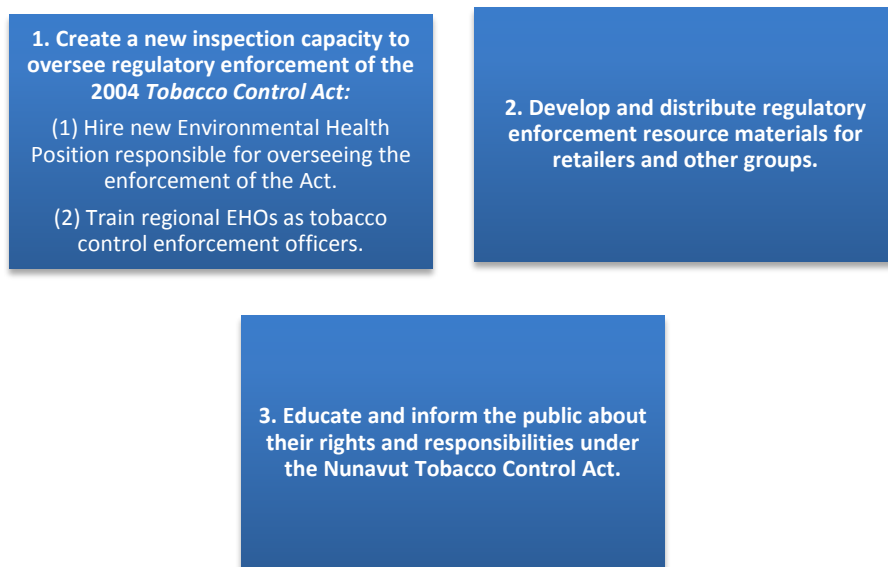
In the 2012-2013 fiscal year progress was made towards addressing the noted barriers to enforcement. The department's implementation plan includes actions to support the regulatory enforcement of the

Tobacco Control Act. Enforcement of the *Tobacco Control Act* will be accomplished by increasing the capacity of the Environmental Health division and transferring responsibility for enforcement of the *Tobacco Control Act* to this division. This is the manner by which other jurisdictions of a similar size (e.g. Northwest Territories) have enforced their tobacco control acts. After a careful analysis of the various options, it was deemed the most efficient way to address enforcement in Nunavut.

Funding was approved for the full implementation of the *Nunavut Tobacco Reduction Framework for Action* over the remaining three years of the plan (2013-2016). Funds have been set aside to increase the Environmental Health division by one full-time coordinating position, which will be primarily responsible for ensuring the *Tobacco Control Act* is enforced by regional Environmental Health Officers. This position will play an educational role around the issue of tobacco use and public safety. Funds will be used to increase all regional Environmental Health Officers budgets, in order to absorb additional expenses related to the duty of enforcing the *Tobacco Control Act*.

The office of the CMOH will oversee this work and ensure these new enforcement duties are carried out on a regular basis in all Nunavut communities, alongside other environmental health monitoring responsibilities. Figure 1 lists the priority enforcement activities.

Figure 1: Enforcement Actions



ANTICIPATED BENEFITS OF ENFORCEMENT OF THE TOBACCO CONTROL ACT

A strong enforcement presence is expected to significantly impact the sale and distribution of tobacco products across Nunavut, ensuring that tobacco retailers comply with the Act and take steps to prevent the sale of these products to underage children and youth. Environmental Health Officers will be trained as enforcement officers and will also play an educational role in communities, helping to ensure residents understand their rights and responsibilities according to the Act. Environmental Health Officers will work to reduce the public's exposure to environmental tobacco smoke, both in terms of workplace exposure and smoking directly outside public entries.

Over the long term, a strong enforcement presence will enable the GN to move forward with other progressive regulatory measures around tobacco use in public spaces, such as restrictions on smoking on hospital grounds and school properties. Consistent monitoring and enforcement of similar types of policies have been very influential in lowering the smoking rates in other Canadian jurisdictions. Strong enforcement will also aid other elements of our territorial Tobacco Reduction Framework. For example, strong enforcement will support tobacco research and monitoring efforts and help the Department of Health better understand tobacco use patterns and behaviors. This information can be used to measure change and tailor policies.

Legislation is just one of six "areas for action" outlined in the *Nunavut Tobacco Reduction Framework for Action*. Alongside enforcing the *Tobacco Control Act*, there are several departmental projects and activities supporting the goals of the Act. Some of these actions, particularly in the areas of "Increasing Community Awareness" and "Targeting Youth and Schools" have been ongoing throughout 2012/13. Several education and awareness activities were part of the second phase of the *Tobacco Has No Place Here* Campaign in 2012/13, including a series of multimedia tobacco education workshops in high schools and a territory-wide contest called *Steps for Change* which encouraged Nunavummiut to take one step in their own life to reduce the impact of tobacco. School-based Youth Action Teams were initiated in six territorial high schools. These action teams took part in monthly challenges related to tobacco education in their community. All of these activities are expected to continue and expand in 2013/14. Territorial taxation data indicates there's been a slight decrease (approximately 3%) in sales of tobacco products in 2012/13, a promising sign that tobacco use is slowing. Territory-wide enforcement of the *Tobacco Control Act* is expected to add momentum to this downward trend.

NEXT STEPS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The next step towards establishing an enforcement presence in Nunavut for the *Tobacco Control Act* is the review and approval of the draft job description for the lead Environmental Health enforcement position. It is expected that the position will be approved and posted within the 2013/14 fiscal year. Once the position is staffed, the enforcement program will be developed to train Regional Environmental Health Officers in the area of *Tobacco Control Act* education and enforcement. Subsequent to this training, the responsibility for enforcing the Act will be transferred to the Environmental Health Division of the Department of Health.

CONCLUSION

While other Canadian jurisdictions have seen steady reductions in tobacco use, rates of tobacco use remain unacceptably high in Nunavut. To respond to this discrepancy, the *Nunavut Tobacco Reduction Framework for Action* was developed. The Department of Health continues to work on implementing the Framework for Action. This work is being supported by additional revenue flowing from an increase in tobacco taxation. Hiring and training staff to carry out this work are the next steps in this process.

Best practices from other jurisdictions that have successfully reduced tobacco use indicate that proper enforcement of the *Tobacco Control Act* will lead to significant savings for the healthcare system and economy. More importantly, it will aid Nunavummiut in adding years of healthy living to their lives. With effective tobacco control policies, programs, and enforcement as well as an appropriate level of investment, there is no doubt that the smoking rates in Nunavut can be substantially reduced.

ⁱ Reid JL, Hammond D, Burkhalter R, Rynard VL, Ahmed R. *Tobacco Use in Canada: Patterns and Trends, 2013 Edition*. Waterloo, ON: Propel Centre for Population Health Impact, University of Waterloo.

ⁱⁱ Statistics Canada (2013) *Smokers, by sex, provinces and territories*. Retrieved online August 17, 2013 from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/health74b-eng.htm>

ⁱⁱⁱ Department of Health (no date). *Lung cancer: Nunavut 1999-2010*. Iqaluit: Government of Nunavut.