

04/05/05

Hon. Dalton McGuinty
Premier of Ontario
Main Legislative Building
Room 281
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

Hon. George Smitherman
Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
Main Legislative Building
Room 447
Toronto, ON M7A 1A4

Honourable Premier McGuinty and Minister Smitherman

Re. Bill 164 – Retail Display Bans

We, the Medical Officers of Health of Ontario, are writing to urge you to implement a complete ban on all point-of-sale tobacco products advertising.

There is tremendous value in prohibiting tobacco ‘power walls’ in retail outlets. Despite the fact that tobacco advertising and sponsorship has been banned in Canada since last year, these large colourful displays – often placed near candy and gum - continue to attract young people to the health hazards of tobacco addiction. Interestingly, kids’ awareness of cigarette brands increases with their frequency of corner store visits. Even children say that these displays are a factor in youth smoking.

Lung cancer remains the leading cause of cancer mortality in Canada, resulting in more deaths than the next three cancers put together (breast, prostate, and colorectal). We cannot allow another generation to succumb to this epidemic, to the ravages of lung cancer, heart disease, and many other illnesses caused by tobacco use. Moreover, our health-care system simply cannot afford it. The social and economic costs of continuing to promote tobacco use are staggering, especially when one considers that these costs are entirely preventable.

We congratulate you for supporting smoke-free public places and workplaces, as this measure will protect the public from the health effects of exposure to second-hand smoke. The case for smoke-free public spaces is irrefutable. However, Bill 164 misses the mark when it states that no person shall display or permit the display of tobacco products in a retail store ‘*except in accordance with regulations.*’ We strongly recommend that you remove the wording ‘*except in accordance with regulations,*’ so that we can offer true and unambiguous protection to our youth.

The Supreme Court of Canada recently upheld Saskatchewan’s right to ban point-of-sale advertising of tobacco in retail establishments. Manitoba has followed that province’s lead. There may not be another chance for many years in Ontario to implement legislation that will so positively improve the future health of our citizens.

We understand the pressures and difficulties you face with respect to Bill 164. Many of us have travelled this road already. We assure you that with our considerable experience, expertise, and local resources, we will support you throughout this initiative, particularly in the early days of implementation.

It is not an exaggeration to say that by taking a strong stand on tobacco control, the Province of Ontario will be putting in place public-health measures comparable to providing citizens with clean water and universal immunization. This honour and legacy is within your grasp.

Sincerely,

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY THE FOLLOWING:

Dr. Howard Shapiro
Acting MOH, Peel

Dr. Michael Finkelstein
AMOH, Toronto

Dr. Doug Sider
AMOH, Niagara

Dr. Jim Pfaff
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