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Ms. Linda Stewart  
Executive Director  
Association of Local Public Health Agencies  
2 Carlton St., Suite 1306  
Toronto, Ontario  
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Dear Ms. Stewart:

**RE: Request for Endorsement Regarding Smoke-Free Movies Initiative**

On 23 March 2011, the KFL&A Board of Health endorsed a request for support from the Ontario Coalition for Smoke-Free Movies. As part of their endorsement, the Board requested that alPHa be informed of this action, and requested that alPHa would also endorse the call to action by the Coalition. As previously discussed with you, we would like this issue to be the first example of an advocacy issue that is vetted through a policy process at alPHa for worthiness and evidence, before it is sent to each Board of Health across the system.

Enclosed is a copy of our endorsement for your information and action. I am sure that the Board would be prepared also to endorse it for the Annual General Meeting, once it has been through the analysis at alPHa. Should we be of further assistance, do not hesitate to contact me.

With kind regards,



Ian MacDonald Gemmill, MD, CCFP, FCFP, FRCP(C)  
Medical Officer of Health

IMG:cbk

Enclosure

Copy to: Board of Health members  
Ontario Coalition for Smoke-Free Movies  
Ontario Medical Officers of Health

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## MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of Health Members, Dr. Ian Gemmill, MOH

FROM: Darlene Mecredy, Director, Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention (CDIP)  
Dave McWilliam, Manager; CDIP, Tobacco Program

DATE: March 23, 2011

SUBJECT: Smoke-Free Movies – To reduce the impact of smoking in movies on youth in Ontario

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Tobacco use is the number one cause of preventable disease and death in Ontario. A review by the US National Cancer Institute on tobacco and media reached an unequivocal conclusion regarding the impact of smoking in movies on youth tobacco use: “The total weight of evidence from cross-sectional, longitudinal and experimental studies indicates a causal relationship between exposure to smoking in movies and youth smoking initiation.”<sup>1</sup> The World Health Organization, U.S. Institute of Medicine and the U.S. National Cancer Institute have all concluded that exposure to tobacco imagery on screen causes adolescents to start smoking and aides progress to regular, addicted smoking. In 2010, Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada released the report entitled *Tobacco Vector*, which stated that 44% of all smokers aged 15-19 start because of smoking in the movies. In Canada, 130,000 teenagers are smoking because of exposure to tobacco on screen, and 43,000 of these children will die prematurely as a result.<sup>2</sup>

The influence of movie smoking on young people should not be surprising, given the pervasive influence of the film industry on popular culture, and the fact that most other vehicles of tobacco promotion have been banned in Canada. The tobacco industry’s collaboration with Hollywood, including paid product placement, is well documented. The tobacco industry’s own files reveal the importance of movies to tobacco promotion: “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.”<sup>4</sup>

The World Health Organization also recommends measures to reduce tobacco depictions in movies. The *Tobacco Vector* report examined the importance of applying 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 collective tobacco control efforts. The *Ontario Coalition for Smoke-Free Movies*, made up of organizations such as the Canadian Cancer Society, Ontario Division; Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario; Non-Smokers’ Rights Association & Smoking and Health Action Foundation; Ontario Lung Association; and Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada; are requesting our support on the following endorsement:

## **ENDORSEMENT OF ACTION ON SMOKING IN MOVIES**

Whereas tobacco use is the number one cause of preventable disease and death in Ontario, and Leaders in public health, 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; and

**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;<sup>3</sup> and

**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;<sup>4</sup> and

**Whereas** adolescents watch more films than any other age group; movie-going is popular entertainment for youth and tobacco imagery in films is currently unavoidable;<sup>2</sup> and

**Whereas** nearly 90 percent of tobacco impressions delivered to theatre audiences in Canada in 2009 were delivered by large US media conglomerates;<sup>2</sup> and

**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;<sup>2</sup> and

**Whereas** exposure to smoking in movies is estimated to be responsible for 44% of youth uptake;<sup>5</sup> and

**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;<sup>2</sup> and

**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;<sup>6</sup>

### **Recommendation:**

**THAT the Kingston, Frontenac, and Lennox & Addington Board of Health endorse the following policy measures to reduce the exposure of youth to smoking in movies:**

- 1) Rate new movies with smoking "18A" in Ontario, with the sole exceptions being a clear and unambiguous demonstration of the dangers and consequences of tobacco use or a true representation of a real historical figure, who was known to smoke;**
- 2) Require producers to certify on-screen that no one involved in the production of the movie received any remuneration, compensation or 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 movie producers to stop identifying tobacco brands in films.**

- 5) **Require that films with tobacco imagery assigned a G, PG, or 14A rating be ineligible for federal and provincial film subsidies; and**

**THAT the Board of Health submit a letter of endorsement including the policies stated above to the Ontario Coalition for Smoke-Free Movies through the Ontario Lung Association attention John Atkinson at [jatkinson@on.lung.ca](mailto:jatkinson@on.lung.ca); and**

**THAT alpha be requested to review the issue of Smoke-Free Movies and endorse the same policy recommendations for consideration by all local boards of health in Ontario.**

References:

1. National Cancer Institute, *Monograph 19: The Role of the Media in Promoting and Reducing Tobacco Use*, June 2008.
2. 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 governments can do about it. Physicians for Smoke-Free Canada. July 2010. Accessed August 2010 [www.smoke-free.ca/pdf\\_1/2010/Tobaccovector.pdf](http://www.smoke-free.ca/pdf_1/2010/Tobaccovector.pdf)
3. <http://www.mhp.gov.on.ca/en/smoke-free/default.asp> Accessed August 17 2010
4. C Mekemson and SA Glantz, "How the tobacco industry built its relationship with Hollywood," *Tobacco Control* 2002; 11: i81-i91. KL Lum, JR Polansky, RK Jackler, et al., *Tobacco Control* 2008; 17: 313-323.
5. C Millett 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
6. World Health Organization, *Smoke-free movies: From evidence to action*, 2009. Accessed April 2010 [http://www.who.int/tobacco/smoke\\_free\\_movies/en/](http://www.who.int/tobacco/smoke_free_movies/en/)