

TOBACCO/VAPING

Tobacco use **remains the leading preventable cause of disease and death in Canada, killing 46,000 Canadians annually.** New Brunswick has the highest daily smoking rates in the country at 13%. Beyond the huge impact on public health, **tobacco use also places an enormous burden on our economy costing the province an estimated \$152 million dollars in healthcare expenses and \$308 million in economic losses.**

While smoking rates have declined over the past 50 years, e-cigarettes have led to a new wave of nicotine addiction among youth. Research shows youth who vape are 3.6 times more likely to transition to tobacco use, fostering the next generation of smokers and a lifetime of nicotine addiction and potential health consequences. Nicotine exposure can impair adolescent brain development, memory, concentration, and impulse control, while vaping introduces harmful chemicals that can damage lungs. The 2021-22 Canadian Student Tobacco, Alcohol, and Drugs Survey found that 24% of high school students in grades 10-12 vape, up from 9% seven years earlier. The NB Student Wellness Survey (2023/24) reports 35% of students in grades 9-12 have tried vaping, with 20.4% vaping daily or occasionally.

The following initiatives will help curb nicotine addiction, protect youth, and reduce smoking-related health and economic burdens:

- 1. Increase the age to purchase tobacco and vaping products from 19 to 21 years of age**
Most smokers start as teens. Raising the minimum purchase age reduces youth access, including social sourcing, and delays nicotine exposure. A 2022 Ipsos poll found 80% of Atlantic Canadians support a minimum tobacco age of 21 for tobacco and e-cigarettes. The Institute of Medicine (2015) concluded raising the minimum age to 21, would reduce youth smoking by 25% among 15-17 year olds.
- 2. Provide universal access for evidence-informed smoking cessation medications and support to New Brunswickers**
Tobacco use is a chronic relapsing disease. Combining counseling with cessation medication is the most effective approach. 27.8% of New Brunswickers lack drug coverage, and many existing plans offer minimal support. Providing universal access as payer of last resort for smoking cessation interventions would ensure equitable treatment for all, particularly low-income individuals.
- 3. Increase the tobacco tax to match inflation**
Increasing tobacco taxes reduces tobacco consumption and increases government revenue. Studies show that higher tobacco taxes are the most effective strategy at reducing smoking and are especially effective at curbing youth smoking. Despite industry opposition citing contraband concerns, the industry itself has raised their prices. New Brunswick should align tobacco taxes with inflation to maintain their effectiveness.
- 4. Establish a Smoke-free Generation Policy (SFG)**
The SFG policy gradually phases out cigarette and e-cigarette sales for those born after a specific year, preventing new generations from becoming addicted. A Canadian model suggests that by 2075, this policy could save \$2.3 billion in healthcare costs and add nearly 477,000 quality-adjusted life years. A UK study predicted that by 2040, smoking rates among 14 to 30-year-olds could drop from 13% to 0.4%, saving thousands of lives and \$19.24 billion CAD in healthcare costs.