

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

An Act to bolster tobacco control

Directors of public health argue in favour of a smoke-free health and social services network

Québec, 20 August 2015 – In his presentation to the health and social services committee studying the bill to bolster tobacco control, Dr. Richard Massé, Montréal's regional director of public health states that, to better protect the population against the harms caused by tobacco, the *Tobacco Act* should include provisions to make all health and social services facilities smoke-free, with the exception of residential and long-term care facilities. Drs. Massé, François Desbiens and Isabelle Goupil-Sormany represent the regional directors of public health who, in their brief, express support for the bill while proposing some amendments.

Tobacco control: A public health priority

The regional directors point out that there are still 1.4 million smokers in the province. Half of them will die from diseases linked to active or passive smoking. Each year, tobacco smoke causes over 10,000 deaths in Québec. Smoking is also linked to many health problems at all stages of life: low birthweight, sudden infant death, respiratory and heart diseases, and many cancers.

Support for a smoke-free network

In their brief, the directors suggest banning smoking rooms except in long-term care facilities, where rooms could be designated as smoking areas. Current legislation upholds the possibility that long-term care facilities, youth centres and rehabilitation centres, for instance, reserve up to 40% of their rooms for smokers, which can expose other residents, employees and visitors to tobacco smoke and increase the risk of fire, says Dr. François Desbiens, regional director of public health for Capitale-Nationale. The regional directors believe it is very important that all facilities set up smoking cessation support programs during the transition toward a smoke-free network.

Better protect the population

The regional directors emphasize the importance of including in the bill measures to prohibit smoking in motor vehicles in which minors under 16 years old are present and on bar and restaurant terraces. To better protect the population, the regional directors suggest adding measures such as banning cigar and waterpipe (hookah) lounges as well as shelters for smokers. To limit children's exposure to secondhand smoke, the regional directors consider that playgrounds should also become smoke-free areas.

Include e-cigarettes in the Act

In the current bill, the *Tobacco Act* would extend to e-cigarettes, a provision that responds to the concerns of the regional directors. According to Dr. Isabelle Goupil-Sormany, regional director of public health for Mauricie and Centre-du-Québec, the precautionary principle should be applied, given the uncertain health effects of e-cigarettes and the popularity of this product among young people. Including e-cigarettes in the *Tobacco Act* would help limit young people's access to this product and the use of e-cigarettes in places where smoking is prohibited.

Ban flavours, including menthol

The regional directors support banning all flavours, including menthol, in all tobacco products. According to the World Health Organization, flavours added to tobacco products encourage youth tobacco initiation. For instance, a study conducted in Québec in 2012–2013 revealed that among secondary 3 to 5 students who smoked every day, almost half smoked mentholated cigarettes.

Raise the price of tobacco products

WHO recognizes that increasing taxes on tobacco products is the most effective way to reduce smoking among both youth and adults. Since Québec is the province where cigarettes are least expensive, the regional directors would like to remind the provincial government of the importance of raising the tax on tobacco products, even though this measure does not come under the *Tobacco Act*.

Adapt policies to foster health

Regional directors, who work in integrated health and social services centres (CISSS) and integrated university health and social services centres (CIUSSS), are mandated to identify threats to the public's health and implement measures to protect it. They work towards adoption of policies to foster the health and well-being of the population.

To access the regional directors' brief: <http://ciusss-centreestmtl.gouv.qc.ca/index.php?id=15249>.

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