

National Non-Smoking Week: Canada Must Remove Barriers That Are Holding Smokers Back from Quitting

Montreal, January 19, 2026 – As Canada marks National Non-Smoking Week, Imperial Tobacco Canada (Imperial) is calling for a renewed focus on what actually helps adult smokers quit, access to legal, regulated cessation tools, and a hard look at policies that are unintentionally slowing progress toward a smokeless future.

Canada has made significant gains in reducing smoking rates over the past two decades. However, [recent data](#) show that progress is stalling and smoking prevalence is no longer declining and may even have edged higher in 2023 and 2024, with roughly 11 % of Canadians still smoking and little change from the prior year. This stagnation threatens Canada’s objective of reducing smoking prevalence to below five percent by 2035.

Imperial agrees with public health organizations on many of their recommendations and we share many of the same goals: preventing youth access, expanding cessation support, strengthening enforcement against illegal products, and investing in programs that help smokers quit. But these goals cannot be met while access to authorized nicotine replacement therapies (NRTs) remains restricted. Treating all NRTs equally and making them available where cigarettes are sold (in convenience retail stores from behind the counter with full age verification) would remove unnecessary barriers for adult smokers and curb reliance on the illicit market.

“One reason progress has slowed is that federal policy is making it harder—not easier—for adult smokers to access regulated alternatives that can help them quit,” said Frank Silva, President & CEO. “National Non-Smoking Week should be about results, not symbolism.”

Authorized nicotine pouches such as ZONNIC are approved by Health Canada as smoking cessation aids, subject to strict standards, and designed for adult smokers seeking to quit. Yet current rules require pharmacist supervision and limit sales to behind the pharmacy counter, which is not the case for other cessation tools such as gums and lozenges.

Meanwhile, restrictive access is fueling the growth of an illicit market. A CBC News investigation revealed widespread illegal sales of unauthorized nicotine pouches. These products are often flavoured, high dose, and sold without age checks or regulatory oversight—directly undermining both youth protection and public health. Imperial has repeatedly warned that the August 2024 NRT related Ministerial Order restricting legal nicotine pouches like ZONNIC has pushed consumers toward these unregulated alternatives rather than away from them.

“A regulated market with clear rules and strong enforcement is far safer than a hollowed out legal market surrounded by illegal supply,” Silva added. “Responsible retailers operating with strict age verification are far more accountable than criminal sellers operating outside the law.”

Imperial supports a balanced, evidence-based approach that prioritizes harm reduction and maintains robust safeguards for youth. This includes restoring adult access to authorized nicotine pouches under strict conditions at the retail locations where smokers already purchase cigarettes and significantly strengthening enforcement against illegal sellers.

“National Non-Smoking Week should be judged by outcomes,” said Silva. “If Canada is serious about reducing smoking, it must remove unnecessary barriers to all legal cessation products, enforce the law against illicit operators, and focus policy on helping adult smokers quit.”

Anything less risks slowing progress and entrenching the very problems public health policy is meant to solve.

About Imperial Tobacco Canada

Imperial Tobacco Canada is the leading tobacco and nicotine company in Canada, part of the global BAT group. Our mission at BAT is to [create A Better Tomorrow™](#) by promoting a Smokeless World. We envision a future where smokeless products replace cigarettes, encouraging smokers to make a Switch to Better.

Imperial is committed to advancing THR through transparency, innovation, and collaboration. One such initiative is Omni™, a platform developed by our parent company BAT, to support education and stakeholder engagement around THR. [Omni™](#) serves as a dynamic resource for those working toward a smoke-free future.

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