

HEALTH LOBBY GROUPS IGNORE SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS IN MOST RECENT CANADIAN STUDENT TOBACCO, ALCOHOL, AND DRUGS SURVEY

Montreal, Quebec – September 22, 2016 – On September 14th the Government of Canada published the results of the 2014-15 Canadian Student Tobacco, Alcohol, and Drugs Survey (CSTADS).¹ Among its findings, the CSTADS showed youth smoking rates were at an all-time low at 3%. On the other hand, marijuana remains the most used substance by Canadian youth after alcohol (40%) with a usage rate nearly six times that of cigarettes.

“We all recognize there are important health risks associated with smoking and the fact that kids should not smoke,” said Eric Gagnon, Head of External and Corporate Affairs for Imperial Tobacco Canada. “But when 3% of Canadian youth smoke cigarettes versus a rate of 17% for marijuana and four out of five youth are drinking alcohol, one has to wonder why these health lobby groups seem unilaterally focused on lobbying for plain packaging of tobacco products.”

Following the release of the CSTADS results, the Canadian Cancer Society issued a press release calling for stricter tobacco regulation by introducing plain packaging for tobacco products but made no mention of marijuana, alcohol or other drugs.

At a Standing Committee on International Trade meeting on June 7, 2016, concerning the Trans Pacific Partnership Agreement, and again when interviewed for an article in the Ottawa Sun, Rob Cunningham, Senior Policy Analyst of the Canadian Cancer Society, said that his organization does not have a position on federal government’s plan to legalize marijuana despite the public health implications of an open market for the drug. Similarly, Flory Doucas of the Quebec Coalition for Tobacco Control said that her organization does not have a position on marijuana when interviewed recently on CBC radio in Montreal.

“If the Canadian Cancer Society and the Quebec Coalition for Tobacco Control were truly concerned about the health of all Canadians, one would assume they would oppose the legalization of marijuana with the same vigor they advocate for plain packaging, a failed Australian experiment,” said Mr. Gagnon.

According to the government of Australia’s own data, youth smoking rates actually increased immediately following plain packaging² and contraband rates continue to rise.

¹ <http://healthy Canadians.gc.ca/science-research-sciences-recherches/data-donnees/cstads-ectade/index-eng.php>

² <http://www.aihw.gov.au/alcohol-and-other-drugs/ndshs/>

The country has not seen an accelerated rate of smoking decline since plain packaging was introduced³ and the legislation is still before the international courts.

“Plain packaging of tobacco products is a public relations stunt and will not reduce smoking rates in Canada,” continued Mr. Gagnon. “These lobby groups are not concerned about kids or health but are rather anti-tobacco prohibitionists. How can they have no position on these issues.”

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³ <http://business.financialpost.com/fp-comment/christian-kerr-australias-warning-to-canada-plain-tobacco-packages-can-backfire>