

THREE NON-LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVES THAT CAN HELP ALL ONTARIANS BREATHE

1. Awareness and education campaign and programming targeted to youth about the health risks of cannabis

- As legalization of cannabis comes into effect July 2018, it is vitally important that the Government of Ontario have in place a comprehensive strategy that protects all Ontarians.
 - Specifically, regulations need to consider strong prevention measures aimed at reducing risk amongst young people.
- The numbers speak for themselves. In 2015, 203,900 grade 7-12 students (21 per cent) reported having used cannabis in the last year. The proportion increases by grade, with 37 per cent of grade 12 students reporting past year use.
- Research informs us that, certainly amongst younger populations, there are misconceptions about the health impacts related to cannabis.
 - In fact, trying marijuana is viewed as relatively low-risk by many young people.
- It's an issue we can't ignore. It's also one we feel we are in a very unique position to work with the government in addressing, through a public education and awareness campaign, such as the work we did in supporting the government's legislation banning smoking in cars with children under the age of 16, as well as through our Youth Advocacy Training Institute (YATI), a resource centre of the Smoke Free Ontario Strategy.
 - YATI equips youth, young adults, and adults working with young people with the knowledge and skills to prevent and reduce tobacco use. It does this through interactive trainings and resources designed to empower young people to advocate for healthier communities. In this way, YATI is well positioned to turn its attention to this important issue.
- The strides that we have collectively made in tobacco control and protecting the lung health of Ontarians are great – and we need to continue to work together to ensure that we don't lose ground. We can't go backwards when it comes to normalization of smoking, and the protection of vulnerable populations.

2. Protecting seniors through an enhanced pneumococcal immunization program.

- While there is no cure for lung diseases such as asthma and COPD, through an effective management plan, individuals affected by these diseases can live fairly active lives.
 - An integral part of any good management plan, as supported by

recommendations made by the Canada's National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI), is vaccination against pneumococcal disease.

- » For the best protection against pneumococcal disease, adults aged 65 years and older should speak to their healthcare provider about getting both the Prevnar® 13 and the Pneumovax® 23 vaccines. Those not previously immunized should receive the Prevnar® 13 vaccine first followed by the Pneumovax® 23 vaccine at least eight weeks later. Those who have previously received the Pneumovax® 23 vaccine should receive the Prevnar® 13 vaccine at least one year after receiving the Pneumovax® 23 vaccine.
- As a means of preventing exacerbations (a significant cause of hospitalization), we found through an economic modelling exercise we conducted, that, if the vaccination rates among COPD patients could be raised to 80 per cent in the first year, first year savings in direct healthcare costs would amount to \$131 million.
- We feel strongly that vaccination is an efficient and cost-effective strategy for the control of infectious disease, including pneumococcal disease. The success of our universal childhood vaccine program points to the need for a similar immunization program where vaccines exist to ensure they achieve their full potential to prevent disease.

3. Ensure spirometry (standard breathing test) is administered to all patients at risk of lung disease, in particular current or former smokers over the age of 40

- Research demonstrates that early detection of COPD and access to smoking cessation services will save the health care system \$19.3 billion over the next 30 years. Proper diagnosis also helps to ensure use of appropriate medications and cost-effective treatments.
 - Results of recent Ontario research indicate that using pulmonary function testing more frequently to diagnose suspected cases of COPD can improve patient outcomes, better use of health-care services and reduce costs.
- The Lung Association provides training to healthcare professionals to administer the test, and to physicians and nurse practitioners to interpret the results.