

## **Additional Q & A: Tobacco and Smoke-Free Environments (TSFE) Policy**

### **Q: Isn't using tobacco products a personal choice?**

Most people who consume tobacco products would like to quit but have difficulty doing so because they are addicted. Tobacco addiction is described as a “pediatric disease”. Canadians tend to experiment with cigarettes at an average of only twelve years of age, far too young to comprehend the nature of tobacco addiction.

70 to 90 per cent of people who smoke regularly are addicted. Compared with other addictive substances, that rate is very high. For example, about 79 per cent of Albertans drink alcohol, but only about 3 per cent drink at levels that suggest they may have an addiction to alcohol.

### **Q: Don't people have the right to smoke? Aren't smoke-free policies and laws an infringement on civil liberties?**

The negative health effects of first and second-hand smoke exposure are well known. The TSFE policy is about protecting people from the effects of second-hand and third-hand smoke and reducing the burden of tobacco related disease and death in Alberta.

There is no constitutional “right to smoke”. The consumption of tobacco industry products is not included in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Previous protests arguing the right to smoke have been dismissed by Canadian courts.

The vast majority of Albertans (over 80 per cent of Albertans aged 15 years of age and over) are non-smokers. There is increasing public support for smoke-free outdoor properties.

People can still use tobacco products and tobacco-like products, but not on the grounds of AHS property.

### **Q: Patients and visitors can be experiencing high levels of stress. Doesn't smoking help relieve stress?**

AHS's priority is to ensure the healthiest environment for patients to help them best recover and to protect everyone from second-hand and third-hand smoke.

Smoking does not relieve stress but actually increases stress. Although people who consume tobacco products may use more when they are stressed and those who are quitting may feel stressed there is no evidence that smoking reduces stress. In fact the opposite is true as smokers tend to report higher levels of stress than non-smokers.

The stress levels of adult smokers are slightly higher than of non-smokers and adolescent smokers experience increasing levels of stress as they smoke more.

**Q: Doesn't quitting smoking cause people to gain weight, and isn't that worse than smoking?**

Obesity is a serious health concern and AHS has numerous services in place to help people reach and maintain a healthy weight. The stress on your heart of smoking one pack of cigarettes per day is equal approximately to being 90 pounds overweight. The average weight gain for people who quit smoking ranges from four to ten pounds. The health risks related to this weight gain are negligible as compared to the health risks of smoking.

**Q: Shouldn't we be focused on helping people quit other "more important" addictions such as drug or alcohol use?**

AHS does offer programs and services to help people end their problematic use of other substances. People who are dependent upon other drugs or alcohol have higher smoking rates than those who are without other addictions. It is important that people with concurrent addictions including tobacco be offered support in quitting tobacco use as they are more likely to die prematurely of tobacco-caused disease than from most other substance abuse problems.

Providing smoking cessation treatment may help people overcome any concurrent addictions as well. Smoking cessation interventions provided during addictions treatment have been associated with a 25 per cent increased likelihood of long-term abstinence from alcohol and illicit drugs.

**Q: Why doesn't the government ban tobacco products?**

Unfortunately, tobacco consumption was widely established before its tragic health consequences became known. The addictive nature of tobacco is well documented, with some studies revealing that it can be harder to quit tobacco than it is to quit heroin or cocaine. Today, tobacco is consumed by more than five million Canadians, many of whom are addicted. A complete ban on tobacco products therefore would be extremely difficult to introduce and enforce and would not show compassion in helping those who are addicted.

**Q: Why can't you have smoking huts that are designated outdoor locations?**

Smoking, second-hand and third-hand smoke are known health hazards. As a health care organization, we are committed not just to healing illness, but also to promoting wellness. Allowing smoking on our grounds, even in designated areas, is not consistent with this commitment. We do not want our patients, visitors and employees to be exposed to secondhand smoke while on our sites.

**Q: Are staff, patients and visitors expected to quit smoking?**

No, people are not mandated to quit smoking. However, we are dedicated to providing comfort measures to those who want to manage their cravings throughout the day and those who choose to quit smoking.

**Thank you for helping to make Alberta Health Services a tobacco and smoke free environment.**