

April 6, 2004

The Right Honourable Paul Martin
Prime Minister of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario

Dear Prime Minister:

We are writing to request a meeting with you to discuss the impact of recent government decisions on the federal tobacco control programme.

You will remember that three years ago today, as Minister of Finance, you participated in a government announcement of a sustained campaign to reduce tobacco use. The amount provided for this five-year programme was \$480 million, with \$210 million allocated to mass-media support for individual and community efforts to help people quit smoking, to prevent young people from starting smoking and to improve protection from second-hand smoke.

You will understand our concern that the tobacco strategy appears to have become collateral damage in efforts to improve public administration and to reduce government waste and inefficiency. Since December 12, 2003, the programme has been threatened by at least three initiatives of central government agencies. These are:

- **The cost control measures announced on December 16, 2003.** These resulted in a suspension of plans for new tobacco control initiatives including mass media campaigns.
- **The moratorium on government advertisements announced on March 15, 2004.** This has, to all appearances, further delayed the mass media component of the tobacco reduction strategy.
- **The expenditure review and budget reallocation process announced March 24, 2004.** The tobacco programme is again threatened by the need for Health Canada to cut \$57 million from its operating budget.

Canadian efforts to reduce smoking are paying off. Tobacco use is falling at the fastest rate in Canadian history, and the number of smoke-free Canadian homes and communities is rapidly growing. But the programme is still urgently required: most of the five million Canadians who continue to smoke want to quit and many will eventually want help in quitting. Eighteen percent of today's teenagers are smokers according to last year's Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey, but without sustained programming that number could easily return to the higher levels (around 27%) of a decade ago.

This important initiative was supported by decades of experience and rigorous research into effective public health programming, including research on optimal levels of funding. It was also supported by hundreds of thousands of Canadians who mobilized behind parliamentary initiatives with similar goals to demonstrate the high priority they gave to tobacco.

Tobacco remains the greatest cause of disease and death in Canada, and one of the continuing and overarching health priorities.

We do not believe that the tobacco control programme needs to be sacrificed in order for the government's other priorities to be met. We believe that the purpose of the moratorium on government advertising can be met by finding alternative mechanisms to continue the mass media component of the tobacco strategy. We urge you to view this campaign as an "ongoing campaign central to government operations," and thus qualifying under the exemptions to the moratorium announced on March 15th.

Please accept the urgency of our request for a meeting.

Yours sincerely,



Ken Kyle
National Director, Public Issues
Canadian Cancer Society



Robert Walsh
Executive Director
Canadian Council for Tobacco Control



Andrew Jones
Director, Corporate and Government Relations
Canadian Dental Association



Louis Gauvin
Coordinator
Coalition Quebecoise pour le contrôle du Tabac



Sally Brown
Chief Executive Officer
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Atul Kapur,
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Vice-President,
The Lung Association