

Aboriginal Cancer Care Unit



Aboriginal Tobacco Strategy

Introduction to the Traditional Tobacco Edition

The Aboriginal Cancer Care Unit (ACCU) honours the Aboriginal path of well-being. To promote health in Aboriginal peoples, we work to advance a wholistic approach to cancer prevention, screening, and research. The Aboriginal Tobacco Strategy (ATS) is a key part of this.

The ATS works to plan and introduce activities and processes that help communities to become “tobacco wise”. A tobacco-wise community knows the difference between traditional Tobacco and commercial tobacco, and has and uses the resources and skills to safeguard the well-being of its members.

The ATS is excited to share with you this special edition of the ACCU newsletter highlighting traditional Tobacco. This issue contains knowledge shared by elders and stories about community-based projects funded by ATS. The elders share their understanding of our relationship with sacred Tobacco. The communities share their stories on how they rose to the challenge of adding to the health of their members and protecting them from the harmful effects of commercial tobacco. We have also included an update about the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care’s recent announcement for a Smoke-Free Ontario. You will also find Internet addresses for additional sources of tobacco-related information.

It is important to distinguish between the traditional (sacred or ceremonial) use of tobacco, and smoking or non-traditional use of commercial tobacco products....

(It’s Our Responsibility, Report of the Aboriginal Cancer Needs Assessment, 2002)

Message from Chris George

Elder for the Aboriginal Tobacco Strategy Working Group



The Sacred Use of Tobacco

Tobacco has been used for many generations as offerings to the spirits for planting, gathering food, healings and ceremonies. The sacred uses of Tobacco are different for many Nations, but a basic truth remains:

Tobacco should be used for prayer, protection, respect and healing. Tobacco is a Medicine. The meaning of Medicine can be translated as having a good mind open to the power of the Creator.

We need to protect and promote the health and well-being of our people and their traditions by stopping the misuse of Tobacco. We can do this by learning about the sacred traditions of our relationship with Tobacco. By paying attention to our environments, our traditions tell us that the right conditions need to be in place for life or ideas to flourish. If we apply this teaching to the development of our Tobacco strategy, we see that our first step is to create the correct conditions in our community. The teaching also reminds us that development takes time and requires patience.

The Aboriginal Tobacco Strategy Working Group

Members of the ATS Working Group are champions of Tobacco dedicated to providing, among other things, support, input and commitment to the direction and outcomes of the Aboriginal Tobacco Strategy.

For more information about the Working Group, please visit www.cancercare.on.ca

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction to the Traditional Tobacco Edition	2
Message from Chris George	2
Sharing Knowledge of Traditional or Sacred Tobacco	3
Tobacco-Wise Community Highlights	4
Program Updates	6
Links	8

Sharing Knowledge of Traditional or Sacred Tobacco

Tobacco generates different thoughts in people and has different meanings for them. The immediate response for many is a question of health and the negative effects that commercial tobacco might have. For others, Tobacco is identified as sacred and has a unique relationship to Aboriginal people rooted in spiritual, ceremonial and medicinal traditions. Elders from two Aboriginal Nations were interviewed for this newsletter: Ernie Benedict from the Iroquois Nation, and Archie Cheechoo from the Cree Nation. We hope their stories will help our readers appreciate the unique relationship that Aboriginal people have always had with Tobacco.



Ernie Benedict
Elder, Iroquois Nation

Creation: A relationship with Tobacco begins to emerge

Sky Woman began to fall to earth, and as she fell she brought with her two main plants of Tobacco and Strawberry. The

water animals watched her descend. In preparation for her, the muskrat took bits of dirt and carried them to the surface of the water. The dirt was placed on the back of the sea turtle, and it is here where Sky Woman landed. The plants she was carrying took seed and continued to grow as Strawberry and Tobacco on what is now known as Turtle Island.

Tobacco was symbolic of the initiation of life, while strawberries symbolized the afterlife. Tobacco was given honour as a plant of a heavenly nature. When Tobacco is burned the smoke rises, which provides the link to all the spirits beyond the sky. Tobacco was a gift that was given to Aboriginal people, and it had a spiritual place within our community. This carried with it a great honour. Pipes are also tools that assisted with communicating with the spiritual world. Therefore smoking Tobacco in pipes was held in a high regard, as symbols of communication with higher powers and great symbols of peace. The pipe was a communicator, a strong symbol of peace when oral language and speech became barriers to communicating.

QUESTION: Is the traditional Tobacco in this story the same as the tobacco they sell in stores? If not, how is it different?

Tobacco in its original form had both honour and purpose. As well, traditional Tobacco did not contain all the **chemicals** that are now put into tobacco. Its purpose is to communicate with the spiritual world, beyond the skies. What is sold today has been tampered with for business and profit, taking away from its original purpose.

QUESTION: There is a belief held by some Native people that commercial tobacco and traditional Tobacco can be used interchangeably. What do we say to people who take this perspective?

When Tobacco is used a spiritual way, it serves a purpose to aspire to good things. However, when commercial tobacco is used for ceremonial purposes, it loses something there. It loses the ideal of **sacredness** in the ceremony. Tobacco is meant to be used in a sacred manner and not to satisfy an addictive need built up within you.



Archie Cheechoo
Elder, Cree Nation

The Story of Life: Original teaching of tobacco begins to emerge

Prior to the creation of the earth as we now know it, there was a time when Creator communi-

cated with all spiritual beings and indicated that an Earth would be created. The spirits of all things, including the animal, bird and tree spirits, said that they wanted to go and be a part of this new creation of the earth. Tobacco would be representing all plant things and was a symbol reflecting creation itself. That is how Tobacco came to have sacredness. Tobacco came before the Creator and said that it wanted to be a part of the ceremonies and teachings of Aboriginal people, to help them communicate between this world and the spiritual world. The understanding of life itself flowed through this connection.

QUESTION: Is the traditional Tobacco in this story the same as the tobacco they sell in stores? If not, how is it different?

Elders like to receive actual Tobacco from the earth, as it was given to us. Elders like naturally picked Tobacco to smoke in the sacred pipes. It is preferred to share with the elders this natural Tobacco.

QUESTION: There is a belief held by some Native people that commercial tobacco and traditional tobacco can be used interchangeably. What do we say to people who take this perspective?

When we try to follow original teachings we need to remember that the people are looking for answers to questions; therefore we need to utilize what is brought forward. In ceremonies, traditional Tobacco is used and is what the spirits like, as this is what our ancestors kept and harvested for them.

QUESTION: What could a person with a need for traditional Tobacco do when they do not have access to any but want to avoid using store-bought?

Archie shared that there is a need to return to the elders to learn to grow and harvest your own Tobacco. The meaning is much more pronounced, not only to yourself but also to the elders, and passes their original teachings on. We need to return Tobacco to its original process of growing using our own sweat and brawn and not adding anything to it. Return it to its **original form** without anything taken away or added, as it was originally given to us. Like many things in our present life, we need to acknowledge that originally it came from the earth. The effort that we put into things as originally given to us will evoke the spiritual part of doing things. To give and receive with your heart makes the spiritual connection: Each human is ultimately a spirit, and that is where all things come from.

Tobacco-Wise Community Highlights

PROFILE WABANO CENTRE FOR ABORIGINAL HEALTH

Sacred Smoke Program — Tobacco Recovery Support Group

The Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health is an urban, nonprofit community centre that provides health services to First Nation, Inuit, and Métis people in the Ottawa region. In 2003 the Wabano Centre developed a culturally specific smoking cessation program, **Sacred Smoke**. Sacred Smoke was created for Aboriginal community members who would like to quit smoking and prefer a wholistic approach.

"It is our responsibility to teach our children the sacredness of Tobacco and our own health."

(Sacred Smoke Program Manual, 2004)

Being able to learn about the sacredness of tobacco, about our own health, and how to stop the misuse of tobacco will ensure the teachings and traditions will be passed down from generation to generation.

(Sacred Smoke Program Manual, 2004)

One of the dynamic features of the program is that it shares knowledge that distinguishes commercial tobacco misuse from sacred Tobacco use. The core difference between this program and mainstream programs is that it honours the unique relationship between Aboriginal people and Tobacco for spiritual, ceremonial and medicinal purposes.

This is not to say that all Aboriginal people have the same spiritual beliefs, as these beliefs are as diverse as the Aboriginal Nations. However, awareness is a vital part of this program, as many would agree that an informed choice is better than choices based on little or no information.



Other components of the program include learning how commercial tobacco affects your health; developing a "quit plan"; stress management and coping skills; understanding why one begins smoking; and being assertive in the healing process. Traditional Aboriginal knowledge is also shared through smudging ceremonies, the seven teachings of the Grandfathers and Grandmothers, the traditional uses for Tobacco, and the spirituality of our First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Nations.

In the next phase of the program, community members become leaders by becoming trainers. These leaders add to their communities' resources for cessation support and raise awareness of the Sacred Smoke program and how it can assist those who want to quit this addiction.

Connie-Gail Crowder, Health Services Manager/Nurse Practitioner for the Wabano Centre, tells us that other smoking cessation programs have had little success. She has found that the Sacred Smoke Program has had better attendance and more success in meeting program goals, such as increasing the awareness of the dangers of commercial tobacco misuse.

Addiction to commercial tobacco is a difficult cycle to break. But with the assistance of the Grandfathers/Grandmothers and the recounting of those original teachings, communities are learning and making informed choices for themselves and their Nations.

PROFILE NIPISSING FIRST NATION

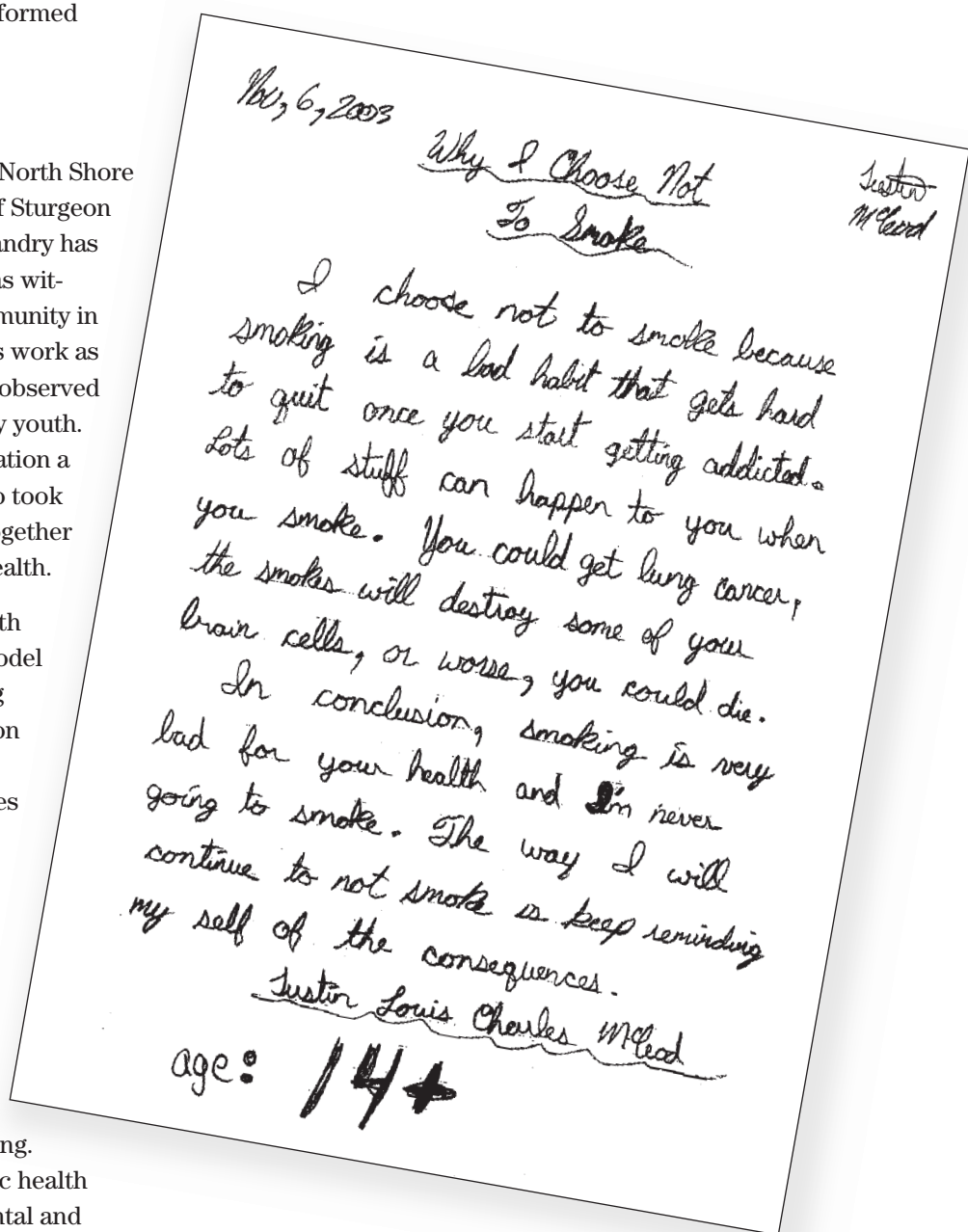
Nipissing First Nation is located on the North Shore of Lake Nipissing between the town of Sturgeon Falls and the city of North Bay. Ray Landry has worked in this community for six years and has witnessed some positive changes within the community in regard to tobacco misuse. When Ray began his work as an addictions counselor in the community, he observed that smoking was prevalent among community youth. At this time he decided to make smoking cessation a priority for his own work. The community also took notice of these same issues and has worked together to help their youth and improve community health.

Young people in the community formed a Youth Steering Committee that provided a visible model for change. They began their work by learning more about the dangers of smoking. In addition to key learnings, they organized community smoke-free events and came up with incentives to encourage other youth to attend. This is an example of the leadership within Aboriginal youth to define a problem and to take steps together to address it on their own.

Another instance of community leadership was the decision to go smoke-free in community-owned buildings and facilities. A community newsletter was used to develop awareness about the harmful effects of smoking. The newsletter is part of a campaign for public health education, with workplace safety, environmental and

community health issues taking priority. After public meetings to consult with the community, Chief and Council moved ahead. This meant further consultation with businesses and consideration of Band economic operations. Band managers continued the process, identifying dates to apply this directive.

The result of this has been a noticeable change. Among community members who smoke, the majority identified that they would like to quit smoking. Creating places in the community where individuals can enjoy the company of others in a smoke-free environment helps people taking steps to quit smoking. Nipissing First Nation has started a journey with all options considered, and the overall health of community members has been the winning choice.



Program Updates

Since the beginning of time, the Indigenous Nations of Turtle Island have considered the sacredness of tobacco.... The smoking of sacred tobacco was not practised for pleasure, but for different ceremonial healing rituals, according to different Aboriginal Nations. As a result, the Indigenous people **consider the smoking of chemical tobacco an abuse to the human body and causing diseases** such as cancer. (*Ononhkwa'shon:a, A Cancer Prevention Culture-Based Project Manual, 2003*)

Ononhkwa'shon:a: A Culture-Based Pilot Project for Cancer Prevention



Jan Longboat, herbalist, traditional healing practitioner and Ononhkwa'shon:a Program Facilitator,

describes Ononhkwa'shon:a as a Mohawk word for "all the Medicines that give us a good life." The Medicines include the proper use of Tobacco, good food, exercise, humour, good mind, songs, stories, dances and dreams. The Ononhkwa'shon:a Program uses a wholistic approach to awaken individuals in the Aboriginal community to a simple yet powerful culture-based cancer prevention lifestyle

The program emphasizes total well-being using the "Circle of Life" wholistic healing model. Participants receive hands-on teachings on planting and harvesting traditional Tobacco, as well as teachings to raise their awareness on the effects of tobacco misuse

on their body, mind and spirit. Those who wish to work toward ending their addiction to commercial tobacco can get one-on-one assistance to make their quit plan, or enter into a culture-based support group.

Earth Healing Herb Gardens and Retreat Centre is located on the Six Nations of the Grand River Territory. The Centre has provided services to Aboriginal people since 1984.

Building Capacity — Certified Native American Cessation Trainers

In partnership with First Nation Inuit Health Branch, the Aboriginal Tobacco Strategy sponsored an initiative called Native American Tobacco Intervention Skills Training. It was designed as a culturally relevant model for training in tobacco cessation skills. The University of Arizona was asked to provide evidence-based training through their Healthcare Partnership Continuing Education and Training Unit. Over 35 health care professionals serving the Aboriginal community were certified.

Community health workers have experienced a growing demand to provide support for smokers trying to quit smoking. ATS saw a need for specialized training in tobacco cessation intervention counseling within Aboriginal communities and took this action in response.

If you would like to increase your community's capacity to assist people in quitting, certified instructors are available to provide training in your community. For more information on how to arrange training in your community, please contact Pamela Johnson at the Aboriginal Tobacco

Strategy, Cancer Care Ontario, at 416 971-9800 ext. 1212, or Lynda Roberts, First Nation Inuit Health Branch, Thunder Bay, at 807 343-5357.

C.R.E.A.T.E

A training tool for health care providers is in the making. The project, called Communities Ready for Eating-Healthy, Active-Living and Tobacco-Wise Environments, will equip health care providers with essential information on cancer, especially prevention. The training tool will include a section on traditional Tobacco and commercial tobacco, told through narration.

The project was born from gaps identified in the 2002 report, *It's Our Responsibility — Aboriginal Cancer Care Needs Assessment*. A communications and advertising company has been hired for creative development of the training tool. A group of health professionals will advise on the project process. From development to province-wide implementation, it will be tested in a series of focus groups within the community.

For more information, contact the Aboriginal Cancer Care Unit. 416-971-9800 ext. 1261

UPCOMING EVENTS

4th National Conference on Tobacco or Health

June 19–22, 2005,
Westin Hotel, Ottawa
www.4ncth.ca

Building Community Capacity and Community Knowledge

ATS recognizes the value of a community capacity-building approach in the development of tobacco-wise communities. Aboriginal communities and organizations have already developed many capacities as part of their ongoing work in addressing Aboriginal health issues. The 2004–2005 pilot projects build upon those existing strengths to enhance a community's current capacity to promote the health of their members and protect them from the harmful effects of tobacco misuse.

ATS also acknowledges the importance of working together to build our collective knowledge on practices or approaches that hold promise in Aboriginal communities. Moreover,

we understand the need to share this knowledge throughout the Aboriginal community in Ontario. The 2004–2005 pilot projects will contribute to the Aboriginal communities' knowledge on community-based tobacco-wise activities.

Twelve successful projects will identify new and unique methods to raise tobacco awareness through a culturally relevant community process. In our next publication, look for an update on what important tobacco health innovations will emerge from the pilot projects.

We thank all the proposal applicants for their hard work and interest. The response received clearly indicates that Aboriginal communities are ready to move forward in protecting the health of the members of their community from the harmful effects of commercial tobacco.

For more information about the 2004–2005 Pilot Projects, please go to www.cancercare.on.ca

News Release from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care

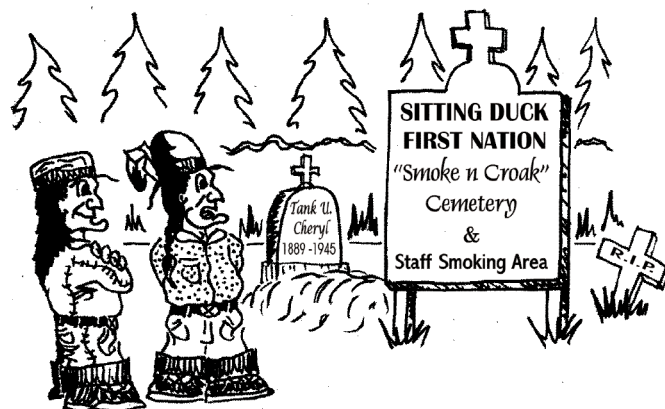
"McGuinty government protecting Ontarians' health with proposed smoke-free legislation — New ban would make all workplaces and enclosed public places smoke-free."

This news release, along with other media materials, can be found at: www.health.gov.on.ca under the News Media section.

WE WANT YOUR QUESTIONS!

Starting next issue, a Cancer Q&A section will appear in our newsletter. We are inviting health professionals and community members to submit their questions to elisa.levi@cancercare.on.ca

BALONEY & BANNOCK By Perry McLeod-Shabogiesic



We thought we would save them some time!

redroad@onlink.net

Links

The Aboriginal Tobacco Strategy is happy to provide this list for your convenience. Any reference to commercial products, services, or organizations does not represent any endorsement or recommendation by us.

FEATURED SITES

Aboriginal Youth Network — Tobacco: A Cultural Approach to Addiction and Recovery for Aboriginal Youth

www.ayn.ca/quit/en/c5_2_being_free.asp

The Tobacco Manual helps the reader to understand

why they smoke and what they can do to stop. The Medicine Bag contains tools and techniques to stop smoking and stop yourself from sabotaging your own success. When combined with the tools available at this website, these materials provide the young person with a culturally relevant method of stopping their abuse of tobacco.

A website for youth made by youth

www.stupid.ca

"About 90,000 kids try smoking every year in Ontario," said Dr. Sheela Basrur, Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health. The campaign specifically

targets young people, a group most at risk of starting to smoke. The campaign features a website, www.stupid.ca, as well as television, cinema and print advertising.

Smokers' Helpline

www.smokershelpline.ca

This free telephone service offers information, advice and support for Smokers who want to quit, may be thinking of quitting, have quit and need support or enjoy smoking and do not want to quit as well as families and friends who want to help a smoker. Call 1-877 513-5333.

Other Tobacco-Related Websites

Ontario Health Promotion Resource Centres
www.opc.on.ca

Ontario Campaign for Action on Tobacco
www.ocat.org

Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
www.health.gov.on.ca

Ontario Tobacco-Free Network
www.theotn.org

Ontario Tobacco Research Unit
www.otru.org

Ontario Tobacco Strategy Media Network
www.media-network.org

Program Training and Consultation Centre
www.ptcc-cfc.on.ca

...and their Electronic Toolkit of Better Practices
www.ptcc-cfc.on.ca/bpt/bpt.cfm

Teen Net
www.cyberisle.org

Lungs Are for Life
www.on.lung.ca

Health Canada's Tobacco Control Programme
www.gosmokefree.ca

First Nations and Inuit Health Branch
www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fnihb-dgspni

Canadian Council for Tobacco Control
www.cctc.ca

Non Smoker's Rights Association/Smoking and Health Action Foundation
www.nsra-adnf.ca

Physicans for a Smoke-Free Canada
www.smoke-free.ca

World Health Organization — Tobacco Free Initiative
www.who.int/tobacco/en

Aboriginal Cancer Care Team

We would like to introduce the Aboriginal Cancer Care Team located within Cancer Care Ontario.

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Manager
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If you would like more information about any of the articles in this newsletter, please contact the Aboriginal Cancer Care Unit at 416 971-9800.

Funding for this program has been provided by the Government of Ontario. No endorsement by the Ministry is intended or should be inferred.



Volume 2, Number 1, 2005