



Lung Health Foundation Submission to Ontario's 2022 Budget Consultations

Jan 20, 2022

We are pleased to provide a submission to the 2022 provincial budget focused on protecting Ontario's progress against the COVID-19 pandemic and supporting Ontarians on their health journeys in the aftermath of the pandemic. The Lung Health Foundation is a national organization focused on the lung health of Canadians. In the areas of disease prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care, we focus on **lung cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and asthma**; and in health promotion, we focus our efforts on **infectious respiratory diseases and vaping/smoking prevention and cessation**.

Our Recommendations:

1. Sustain funding to the Lung Health Foundation's Asthma & COPD Action Program

COVID-19 has augmented the challenges faced by patients with chronic lung diseases such as asthma and COPD. Disruptions in chronic care management were common, leading to an increase in the number of exacerbations and the subsequent need for ED admissions and hospitalization. Effective asthma and COPD management is critical to reducing the mortality, morbidity, and healthcare costs of asthma and COPD in Ontario. The Lung Health Foundation's Asthma and COPD Action Program offers a wide range of education and program services to children with asthma, adults with asthma or COPD, their caregivers, healthcare providers, and the public, including educational resources and events, live counselling from certified respiratory educators, and supportive services.

The funding we receive from the Government of Ontario supports the sustainability and evolution of our respiratory care programs. This support has allowed us to test out innovative interventions to align with Ontario's healthcare system and continuously improve the quality of care throughout the pandemic. For example, we adapted our approach to delivering direct-to-patient support programming—including 1:1 patient education through our Lung Health line, peer support groups, and exercise maintenance courses—to function in more direct connection to the healthcare system. Increasingly, we are offering these supports to patients virtually to provide a more consistent, positive patient experience. With this, we call on the Government of Ontario to ensure sustained funding to the Asthma & COPD Action Program.

2. Provide funding for the youth vaping and smoking cessation program – Quash

While vaping rates among Canadian teens and youth have slightly declined during the pandemic, about one in seven young Canadians continue to vape. Additionally, smoking rates (8%) in young adults aged 20-24 remains higher than Health Canada's no smoking target of 5%. Despite the alarming youth vaping and smoking rates, there are significant gaps in the existing prevention and cessation programs' abilities to address vaping and target youth.

In 2019, with support from Health Canada, the Lung Health Foundation developed and implemented Quash, a smoking and vaping cessation program designed to help Canadian youth aged 14-19 on their quitting journey. As a free mobile app, Quash provides multifaceted programming, online tools, and vital resources to facilitate behavior change in young people and help sustain their success. The second portion includes a digital e-module that trains adult facilitators in the delivery of the in-person version

of the smoking and vaping cessation program for youth who want to quit in a group setting. The funding cycle for Quash is set to expire next year, yet there is still so much work to be done in supporting young Canadians in their quitting journey. We are seeking government support to continue the provision of the program, increase engagement and expand the scope to meet the needs of marginalized communities.

3. Expand the Ontario Lung Screening Program beyond the available four sites

The COVID-19 pandemic has severely affected all aspects of the lung cancer patient pathway from screening and diagnosis to treatment and follow-up care. However, the pandemic's largest impact will be on Canadians who have lung cancer but don't yet know it. Currently, about 50 per cent of lung cancers are diagnosed at a late stage (stage III or IV). With the proper screening protocols in place, 75 per cent of diagnoses could be completed at an early stage, when curative treatment is possible.

Screening programs that detect lung cancer early are inexpensive and they present dramatic cost savings to the health system. In April 2021, the Ontario government announced that the Lung Cancer Screening Pilot for People at High Risk would be made permanent – an important step in diagnosing patients early. However, screening is currently only available in 4 sites across Ontario, making access limited. Marginalized and at-risk groups with higher incidences of lung cancer do not have equitable access to screening and risk being left behind. To make matters worse, the pandemic further strained the already scarce resources and support that were being offered at these sites. Throughout the past 18 months, the program had witnessed a significant decrease in screening volumes and some of the sites had experienced serious backlogs. There is an urgent need to make screening as easily accessible as possible to Ontarians in order to reduce lung cancer mortality.

4. Implement a provincial sales tax on vapes and vape products in Ontario

The 2021 federal Budget proposed to introduce a new taxation framework for the imposition of excise duties on vaping products in 2022. Though we commend this proposal and hope to see through its implementation, we believe the government of Ontario can also play a crucial role by coordinating with the federal government to administer a provincial sales tax on vaping products. Doing so will not only ensure consistency in taxation policy between the federal and provincial government but also serve as a disincentive to youth to initiate vaping given the price sensitivity of this age group.

In Canada, British Columbia has implemented a 20% provincial sales tax on vapour products, while Nova Scotia and Newfoundland have each implemented 20% commodity taxes. Saskatchewan also recently replaced their 6% provincial sales tax with a 20% vaping products tax. Ontario must follow in the footsteps of these provinces to effectively curb youth vaping rates. Tobacco tax has been very effective in reducing youth smoking rates over the past several years. Making vaping products less affordable and thus, less attractive to young people in Ontario, will work to discourage youth from initiating on vapes.

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