

Nova Scotia Law Amendments Committee

re: amendments to Tobacco Access Act

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Good afternoon and thank you for allowing me to share my research with you today.

I am an Assistant Research Professor at the Propel Centre at the University of Waterloo. I hold a PhD in public health and for the last several years have been working closely with the Canadian Student Tobacco, Alcohol and Drugs Survey (CSTADS), a national school-based survey administered by Propel, where I work. CSTADS is funded and overseen by Health Canada and is coordinated by Dr. Steve Manske, my Propel colleague. CSTADS is the largest survey on Canadian youth smoking and provides the most scientifically sound and up-to-date evidence on youth tobacco use in Canada. The CSTADS project itself receives no oversight nor funding from the Canadian Cancer Society. The Propel Centre does receive support from the Canadian Cancer Society Research Institute through a major program grant. In 2012/2013, the CSTADS team, with help from two of Canada's leading statisticians (Drs. Matthias Schonlau and K. Steve Brown) who have over 40 years combined experience in statistics and survey design, randomly selected and recruited 27 Nova Scotia schools. Over 4,600 Nova Scotia students in grades 6-10 participated. The information you have received to date about the percentage of Nova Scotia youth who use flavoured tobacco came directly from these 4,600 participants.

Today I'll tell you why data we gathered and indeed, evidence from around the world, strongly supports Bill 90, and especially the proposed menthol ban. We hear a lot about candy and fruit flavoured tobacco, but menthol is by far the most popular tobacco flavour among Nova Scotia youth. Of the 3,600 Nova Scotia youth who use flavoured tobacco, fully half of them – 1,800 – them use menthol cigarettes! In simple terms: banning flavoured tobacco without banning menthol is like banning soda pop but allowing Coke and Pepsi.

As you know, the latest CSTADS data from 2012/2013 show that 48% of grades 9-12 tobacco users in Nova Scotia use flavoured tobacco products. About a third (34%) of Nova Scotia grades 9-12 smokers report currently smoking menthol – and these are cautious estimates – likely the actual percentages are even higher. Unfortunately, our youth bear an unequal burden in these flavoured products. In Canada, while just one in 20 adult smokers use menthol, almost one in three youth who smoke use menthol cigarettes.

You might ask whether most of the kids using flavoured tobacco are just casual users. But many of those “just casual users” will become addicted to nicotine. In the definitive Canadian study, over 4.5 years of follow-up, one third of novice smokers converted to tobacco dependence. This evidence suggests that a third of Nova Scotia youth who are novice tobacco users right now will become addicted to nicotine. Flavours – especially menthol – make it easier for them to start. And use of menthol cigarettes is even higher among daily smokers at 43% than all users (29%) in our high school sample. I’ll also repeat that other research shows at one of three novice smokers becomes addicted.

The tobacco industry and the organizations it funds, like Convenience Store Associations, has criticized our use of the “last 30 day” measure to categorize “current” smokers. In fact, asking people, including youth, about what kinds of tobacco products they used in the last 30 days is a standard research protocol for categorizing “current users” as different from people who may have only tried a product once in the distant past.

You may have heard that there is no conclusive association between menthol smoking and smoking initiation or addiction in Canada. We recently published a study showing that Canadian kids who report currently smoking menthol smoke about two cigarettes per day more than kids who don’t smoke menthols. Menthol smokers are also more likely to report that they intend to continue smoking compared to kids who don’t smoke menthols. Critics may say, however, that because CSTADS is cross-sectional, that is – takes a snapshot in time – we don’t know for sure whether the Nova Scotia kids who completed our survey started smoking with menthols and we unfortunately don’t know how frequently they smoke menthol compared to regular cigarettes. This, in fact, is technically true. But – and I cannot stress this enough – from the existing evidence, it is very clear

that the tobacco industry market segmentation policy aimed at young and inexperienced smokers leans heavily on menthol.¹⁻⁵ Youth from all walks of life and from many countries are more likely to experiment with menthol cigarettes than with non-menthol cigarettes,⁶⁻¹⁰ in part because menthol provides a cooling sensation and makes it easier to inhale cigarette smoke more deeply. Menthol cigarettes are just as harmful as regular cigarettes, even though many people perceive them to be less harmful than regular cigarettes.^{11,12} Finally – many studies have found that menthol cigarette use increases nicotine addiction^{6,7,9,13} and actually makes it harder for smokers to quit smoking.¹⁴ True, these studies were not conducted in Nova Scotia. But it would be irresponsible to ignore the solid evidence that menthol increases smoking initiation and nicotine addiction. Are Nova Scotia youth really so different from every other population in the world where these studies were conducted that they need their own study to prove what we already know?

Finally, you have heard the argument that banning flavours will increase contraband. There are no good data on contraband – this is part of the challenge of measuring the black market. But instead of throwing out another wild speculation of what *could* happen, I'd like to focus on the fact that our survey showed that 46% of Nova Scotia youth who usually buy tobacco actually report usually buying cigarettes from stores rather than buying them from friends or other people. It seems there is still a long way to go before retailers themselves are not selling to kids, regardless of the contraband market.

Here is my message: Congratulations, Nova Scotia, on being Canadian leaders in banning on all tobacco flavours. Thank you for recognizing that products that kill when used as directed should not taste good. I look forward to World No Tobacco Day next month to watch Nova Scotia set the example for other Canadian provinces when Bill 90 is implemented.

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