

# Smoke-Free Campus Policy: Background and Scientific Rationale

## Introduction

Over the past 20 years, smoking rates in Ontario have been reduced by almost a third. The creation of smoke-free spaces, like restaurant patios, playgrounds, and public sports fields, have protected many people from the harmful effects of second-hand smoke (SHS).<sup>1</sup> Despite this success, smoking remains the single greatest cause of preventable disease and death in the province, killing about 13,000 Ontarians each year.<sup>1</sup>

While the Smoke-Free Ontario Act prohibits the sale of tobacco products on post-secondary campuses, it does not prohibit outdoor smoking or other tobacco use. Although Ontario lags behind many other jurisdictions, on January 1, 2018, McMaster University became Ontario's first 100% tobacco and smoke-free post-secondary institution. Tobacco and/or smoke-free policies are in place at post-secondary institutions in other parts of Canada, the United States, and internationally (e.g., Australia, Denmark, Finland, Hong Kong, and the United Kingdom).<sup>1</sup>

To put it simply, tobacco and smoke-free policies work. Research shows tobacco and smoke-free policies make it easier for tobacco users to quit, protect non-smokers from SHS, and reduce social exposure to tobacco products. Campus-wide tobacco and smoke-free policies are associated with lower smoking prevalence, increased negative attitudes toward tobacco use, and decreased intentions to smoke.<sup>2</sup>

## Why are smoke-free campus policies a good idea?

### 1. They eliminate exposure to second-hand smoke (SHS).

- It is well-documented that exposure to SHS leads to adverse health effects like heart disease, lung cancer and respiratory tract infections, and premature deaths among exposed children and adults. There is no safe level of exposure to SHS, even outdoors.<sup>3</sup>
- Outdoor exposure to SHS is a serious concern. In crowded conditions, such as doorways, air quality can be comparable to indoor levels during active smoking.<sup>4</sup>
- Tobacco cigarettes are not the only combustible product that poses health risks:
  - **Shisha** (usually tobacco sweetened with fruit or molasses sugar, heated using coal or charcoal, and smoked using a water pipe) generally contains nicotine, tar, carbon monoxide and other toxins, such as arsenic and lead. When someone smokes shisha, the person as well as anyone around them breathes in those toxins. The risks from exposure to secondhand shisha smoke is higher than tobacco smoke because people often smoke shisha for longer periods (i.e., the average smoking session lasts an hour) and can inhale the same amount of smoke as more than 100 cigarettes. While some forms of herbal shisha do not contain tobacco, they still put people at risk from secondhand exposure to carbon monoxide and toxins related to burning.<sup>1</sup>

- **Cannabis** also produces toxins and carcinogens that can damage the lungs, blood vessels, and heart. The smoke produced when smoking cannabis is considered as harmful to non-smokers as cigarette smoke.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. They decrease smoking rates and make it easier to quit smoking.

- Most Ontarians who smoke want to quit. But, given the highly addictive nature of nicotine, it may take multiple attempts before an individual successfully quits. Therefore, it is essential to create environments that encourage and support quitting.<sup>1</sup> Campus-wide tobacco and smoke-free policies create an environment where quitting smoking is the easy, obvious choice.
- A 2015 systematic review and meta-analysis found consistent evidence that tobacco-free or smoke-free campus policies were shown to significantly decrease smoking prevalence and daily cigarette consumption.<sup>5</sup>
- A 2016 Cochrane systematic review found that after smoke-free campus policies were implemented, there was a reduction in SHS exposure at building entrances on campuses, and more staff and students preferred the smoke-free environments.<sup>6</sup>

## 3. They help de-normalize smoking and tobacco product use.

- Campus-wide tobacco and smoke-free policies protect against social exposure to tobacco products. Removing social exposure, and thus tobacco visual and sensory cues, is essential to preventing people from starting to smoke.<sup>7,8</sup>
- Campus-wide tobacco and smoke-free policies prevent people who smoke from congregating outside of buildings which can create false perceptions of high smoking rates.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, the 2016 National College Health Assessment found that although 9.3% of University of Guelph student respondents reported actually using cigarettes in the past 30 days, 77.5% of respondents perceived that other students used cigarettes in the past 30 days.<sup>9</sup> The absence of a campus-wide tobacco and smoke-free policy may have contributed to these high rates of perceived use versus actual use of cigarettes among University of Guelph students.

## 4. They protect young adults, a group that is highly vulnerable to starting to smoke, from both exposure to SHS and social exposure to smoking.

- In the past, it was thought that young adults' chances of starting to smoke were almost non-existent if they did not begin to smoke during high school.<sup>10</sup> More recently however, research has shown that up to 20% of smokers report having their first cigarette after the age of 18 – after they begin post-secondary education.<sup>11,12,13,14,15</sup>
- Virtually no one starts using tobacco after age 24, so the focus of tobacco prevention efforts must be youth and young adults, who are particularly susceptible to starting to smoke and, once they do, are at high risk of becoming regular smokers.<sup>1</sup>
- Despite improvements in recent years, past 30-day current smoking is firmly established among 18- to 19-year olds (10%), young adults aged 20 to 24 (17%), and young adults aged 25 to 29 (23%).<sup>16</sup>

## 5. They reduce litter on campus.

- Cigarette butts are the most common source of litter on earth and can take up to 10 years to decompose.<sup>9</sup>
- By eliminating cigarette litter, campuses are decreasing fire risk, decreasing the cost and time associated with cleaning up litter, and increasing campus aesthetics.<sup>17</sup>

## 6. They decrease exposure to new and emerging tobacco and nicotine products.

- As part of the tobacco industry's efforts to continue earning profits in the face of irrefutable evidence of smoking-related harms, growing social disapproval of cigarettes, and decreasing smoking rates, companies are investing heavily in new products and devices that deliver nicotine, such as e-cigarettes.<sup>1</sup>
- Electronic cigarettes (i.e., e-cigarettes, e-cigs, mods, e-hookahs, vape pens, and tank systems) are battery-operated devices that change a liquid chemical, commonly called e-juice, into a vapour that can be inhaled. This is often called vaping.<sup>18</sup>
- Vaping is often promoted as a "safer" alternative to smoking tobacco and as a means to help people quit smoking. But, there are many concerns associated with vaping, namely the limited research on the safety and long-term health effects of e-cigarettes and second-hand vapour and on their effectiveness as a smoking cessation tool.<sup>19</sup>
- In 2015, past-year use of e-cigarettes among adults 18 years and over was 11%, a significant increase over that reported in 2013 (7%). At 33%, young adults 18-24 had a significantly higher rate of past-year use of e-cigarettes than all other age groups in 2015 (13% in 2013).<sup>16</sup>
- According to the most current research on e-cigarettes, there is substantial evidence that e-cigarette use by youth and young adults increases their risk of using tobacco cigarettes.<sup>20</sup>

**Note:** The reference to "tobacco use" does not include the cultural and ceremonial use of tobacco by Aboriginal peoples.

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