
NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
2011PREM0049-000518
May 9, 2011

Office of the Premier
Ministry of Health

Premier Christy Clark announces free support to help smokers

VANCOUVER – Nicotine replacement therapies will be available to all British Columbian smokers at no cost and smoking cessation prescription drugs will be covered under PharmaCare, Premier Christy Clark announced today.

“Every year tobacco-related deaths rob us needlessly of friends, family and loved ones,” said Premier Christy Clark. “Tobacco is the largest single cause of premature death and disease in our province and while a lot of progress has been made, there is still more we can do. This program will provide smokers with a new level of direct support to quit, to live smoke-free, and to improve their own health as well as the health of their families.”

Starting Sept. 30, 2011, British Columbians will have the choice of either nicotine gum or patches to help quit tobacco with a free supply for up to 12 weeks, or obtaining coverage of prescribed smoking cessation drugs through PharmaCare. The program will cost an estimated \$15 million to \$25 million, based on the number of individuals who use the program.

Over the coming months, the Ministry of Health will work with groups such as the B.C. Lung Association, the Heart & Stroke Foundation of BC and Yukon, the Canadian Cancer Society, BC and Yukon Division, BC Pharmacy Association, pharmaceutical manufacturers, health authorities and the BC Medical Association on the best way to implement the program, including how to distribute nicotine gum and patches.

“By reducing the number of people who smoke, not only will we prevent or delay the onset of diseases like heart attacks and cancer, but also avoid the millions of dollars cost on our health-care system,” said Health Minister Michael de Jong.

Each year, more than 6,000 British Columbians die from tobacco use. The cost to the B.C. economy is approximately \$2.3 billion annually, including \$605 million for direct health-care costs.

“Providing coverage for these cessation therapies is a significant step forward in helping even more British Columbians break their dependency on tobacco. For some people wanting to quit, having to pay for these therapies is a barrier in helping them achieve success. Providing this additional support is certain to make a difference,” said Heart & Stroke Foundation of BC and Yukon’s COO Diego Marchese.

“Quitting cold turkey can be tough, and quit smoking aids can help people not only quit but also prevent them having a relapse and starting to smoke again,” said Scott McDonald, CEO of the BC Lung Association.

“Lung cancer accounts for 26 per cent of all cancer deaths in B.C. Providing people with tools to quit smoking will pay off in the long run, as tobacco is the single largest preventable cause of death and disease,” said Cathy Adair, VP cancer control, Canadian Cancer Society BC and Yukon. “We are glad to see the Premier show leadership towards cancer prevention.”

“The BC Medical Association has been advocating for a decade that one of health care’s most cost-effective measures in reducing death, disease and medical costs be a covered expense,” said BC Medical Association president-elect Dr. Nasir Jetha. “We are extremely pleased that clinical tobacco intervention and stop-smoking medications will now be available to all British Columbians with full government support. This is great news for the 70 per cent of B.C. smokers who are wanting to quit.”

BC Pharmacy Association CEO Marnie Mitchell said, “Many community pharmacists already offer support and advice to patients who wish to stop smoking, including smoking cessation clinics. We welcome the chance to be involved in this consultation, as community pharmacists are a trusted, accessible health-care resource.”

As part of the consultation, government will look at ensuring the provision of nicotine replacement therapies and smoking cessation prescription drugs is looked at through a rural lens, making sure products are accessible to all B.C. smokers, regardless of where they live.

While B.C. has the lowest smoking rate in Canada at 14.9 per cent, there are approximately 550,000 British Columbians who smoke. An estimated 70 per cent of smokers in B.C. want to quit.

Currently, QuitNow Services offers British Columbian smokers a confidential helpline (1 877 455-2233) with information available in 130 languages and an online quit community where professional and peer support is available 24/7. As well, quitters can sign up for email quit tips and text messages, join QuitNow’s Twitter and Facebook page and explore interactive quit tools and resources at: www.quitnow.ca

Media Contacts: Shane Mills
 Office of the Premier
 250 661-1015

Ryan Jabs
Media Relations Manager
Ministry of Health Services
250 952-1887 (media line)

Connect with the Province of B.C. at: www.gov.bc.ca/connect