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McGUINTY GOVERNMENT STEPPING UP FIGHT AGAINST SMOKING *Invests Unprecedented \$50 Million For Anti-Smoking Initiatives*

TORONTO – The McGuinty government is investing an unprecedented \$50 million this year in its Smoke-Free Ontario Campaign – the largest anti-smoking investment in the province’s history, Health and Long-Term Care Minister George Smitherman announced today.

“We’re protecting people from second-hand smoke, we’re helping prevent young people from starting to smoke and we’re giving people the tools they need to quit,” Smitherman said. “We are backing up strong anti-smoking laws with equally strong enforcement initiatives and programs to help individuals and communities make Ontario smoke-free.”

The \$50 million represents a 66 per cent increase from 2004/05. It will be invested in 2005/06 to support the three main goals of the Smoke-Free Ontario Campaign: protection, prevention and cessation. It includes funding for youth prevention programs, cessation, public education and enforcement, as well as initiatives targeted at high-risk populations such as Aboriginal communities and low-income earners.

“The Smoke-Free Ontario Campaign will result in reduced tobacco use, fewer illnesses and fewer deaths,” said Dr. Sheela Basrur, Ontario’s Chief Medical Officer of Health. “We’re stopping smoking in its tracks by preventing kids from lighting up and becoming addicted to tobacco. We’re also ensuring help is readily available for Ontarians who want to quit smoking.”

The \$50 million includes:

- Youth Prevention Programs (\$5.6M): Funding for community and school-based prevention programs.
- Cessation (\$13.8M): Funding for new programs targeting high-risk populations and to expand existing tobacco initiatives including: the Ontario Medical Association, Ontario Pharmacists' Association and Ontario Dentists' Association's program to train health professionals on cessation; the “Leave the Pack Behind” program to educate post-secondary students about the hazards of smoking; and Smokers' Helpline. This winter, the government will launch a major cessation initiative including improved access to nicotine-replacement therapies.
- Aboriginal Programs (\$2M): Funding for prevention, education, cessation and tobacco control resources in Aboriginal communities.
- Evaluation, Surveillance and Administration (\$4.6M).
- Provincial Support Programs (\$2.7M): Funding for support, training and technical assistance for tobacco control staff and resources for health care organizations, communities and the public.
- Public Health Units (\$7.7M): Funding to increase the resources of public health units for health protection and enforcement.

- Public Education (\$13.6M): Funding to increase public awareness of and support for protection, prevention and cessation through mass media and programs targeting high-risk communities.

The McGuinty government has also introduced the Smoke-Free Ontario Act that will, if passed, ban smoking in all enclosed public places and workplaces as of May 31, 2006. This would include restaurants, bars, schools, private clubs, sports arenas, entertainment venues, work vehicles and offices. As well, the legislation contains tougher restrictions on tobacco sales to minors and a ban on displays of tobacco products in retail outlets. The legislation is currently before the legislature for final debate.

"We applaud the government's commitment to making Ontario 100 per cent smoke-free and for responding to the concerns of the health care community," said Rocco Rossi, Chief Executive Officer, Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario. "We look forward to working in partnership with the government to reduce smoking and exposure to tobacco smoke. A smoke-free Ontario is not only good public health policy, it's an admirable goal that will save countless lives."

In addition to the human toll, tobacco-related diseases cost the Ontario economy at least \$1.7 billion in health care annually, resulting in more than \$2.6 billion in productivity losses and accounting for at least 500,000 hospital days each year.

Today's announcement is part of the McGuinty government's comprehensive plan to improve health care in Ontario. The plan includes keeping Ontarians healthier, reducing wait times for key procedures, creating Family Health Teams, and increasing access to doctors and nurses.

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