



SASKATCHEWAN  
COALITION  
FOR TOBACCO  
REDUCTION

## Forty Years of Leadership: The History of the Saskatchewan Coalition for Tobacco Reduction (1973 to 2013)

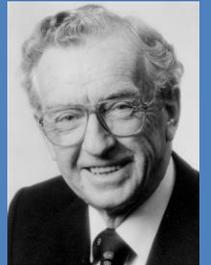
The *Saskatchewan Coalition for Tobacco Reduction* is a provincial coalition of 20 health groups and regions working to reduce tobacco-related diseases and deaths in Saskatchewan. The Coalition has initiated tobacco reduction initiatives in Saskatchewan since 1973 and celebrated its fortieth anniversary in 2013.

### The Coalition's Founders

Dr. Vince Mathews and Dr. George W. Piper founded the Council as a way to address the epidemic of tobacco-related illnesses and deaths in Saskatchewan. In 1973, the smoking rate was 46%, compared to 19% in 2012. The group's original name was *The Saskatchewan Interagency Council on Smoking and Health*.

Dr. Mathews served as the Swift Current Region's Medical Health Officer from 1948 to 1957. He was also an Associate Deputy Minister of Health and Head of the Department of Social and Preventive Medicine, College of Medicine, University of Saskatchewan from 1964 until 1987. Dr. Mathews was a celebrated national and international leader in public health, as well as a key player in Saskatchewan's evolving health system.

*Dr. George Piper*



*Dr. Vince Mathews*



Dr. George Piper became Medical Health Officer of the Humboldt-Wadena Health Region and, later, the Saskatoon Rural Health Region. He also led many provincial and national health organizations. In 1981, Dr. Piper called on Canadian physicians to reduce the epidemic of tobacco-related deaths. His recommendations resonate with 'best practices' outlined in World Health Organization reports and the

Saskatchewan Coalition's 'best practices' reports decades later:

*There are many avenues through which action against smoking may be pursued - education, counteradvertising, regulation of public smoking and manipulation of prices.*

Dr. G. Piper, Canadian Medical Association Journal, May 15, 1981

## Early Beginnings

The first meeting of the Saskatchewan Coalition for Tobacco Reduction was held January 24, 1973. Meetings in the 1970's were attended by organizations such as the Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association, Saskatchewan Health, Saskatchewan Education, Saskatchewan Health Care Association, the Saskatchewan Heart Foundation, the MacNeil Clinic in Saskatoon, the Health Regions of North Battleford and Saskatoon, the Saskatchewan Public Health Association, the City of Regina Health Department, the Saskatoon City Health Department, the Saskatchewan Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, the Canadian Cancer Society and Continuing Medical and Nursing Education, University of Saskatchewan.

## An Environment of Normalcy

In the 1970's, there was an environment of tobacco acceptability. The tobacco industry freely promoted its products and people smoked in most public places and workplaces.

For example, here is a Rothmans billboard beside the City of Regina Health Department. A smoking prevalence of 45% reflected these conditions.



In the 1970's and early 1980's, the Council's tobacco reduction activities focused mainly on educating children not to smoke and assisting smokers to quit. This was a common focus of health groups at the time.



*An early smoking cessation booth at the Regina Exhibition.*

## Secondhand Smoke Kills

A landmark 1986 United States Surgeon General's report completely changed the environment. The report provided research showing second-hand smoke is hazardous to health and responsible for deaths. The *Saskatchewan Inter-Agency Council on Smoking and Health* shifted its priorities to include promotion of smoke-free spaces.

The first bylaw to restrict smoking in western Canada was passed in 1980 by the City of Regina with assistance from its Health Department, a member of the Council. A far cry from the smoke-free legislation of today, the bylaw provided 'non-smoking areas' in some facilities.

In the years following, Council members assisted many cities and towns to pass bylaws. This resulted in a patchwork of smoke-free and partly smoke-free public places across the province. To counter this, the *Saskatchewan Interagency Council on Smoking and Health* encouraged the provincial government to pass legislation to create a provincial standard for smoke-free spaces. At that time, no provincial tobacco-related legislation, except the Tobacco Tax Act, had been passed since youth accessibility legislation of 1896!

A 1998 letter from the Council to the Minister of Health stated:

*The province of Saskatchewan needs a strategy to counteract this epidemic. The lack of legislation and other tobacco reduction strategies means that Saskatchewan youth are not provided the same protection as children and youth in other provinces.*

Although there was an attempt to get provincial legislation passed, it was unsuccessful. However, it had a very positive effect of raising the public's awareness of the importance of the legislation.

## Tobacco Free Saskatchewan Network

In 1998, the *Saskatchewan Interagency Council on Tobacco and Health* developed the Tobacco Free Saskatchewan Network. The email network's original purpose was to communicate information related to possible provincial legislation to health workers. Since distance tends to isolate Saskatchewan people interested in tobacco issues, the Network allowed information to be communicated in a timely fashion. The Network continues to this day providing tobacco reduction information to approximately 200 Saskatchewan health workers.

## Special Committee on Tobacco Control

Health organizations continued to promote provincial legislation, and in December, 1999, the provincial government announced it would strike a *Special Committee on Tobacco Control*:

*"To study impact of tobacco use and tobacco reduction strategies particularly relating to youth"*

In 2000, the All Party Committee held public meetings throughout Saskatchewan and met with youth and other stakeholders.

Members of the *Saskatchewan Interagency Council on Smoking and Health* attended the public meetings and reported back to health workers via the *Tobacco Free Saskatchewan Network*.

The Council also provided messaging about the importance of legislation to the public, stakeholders and policy makers. A brochure containing quotations from the public and others was produced. It stated:

*85% of presentations at the hearings of the All Party Committee on Tobacco Control support strong legislation to protect Saskatchewan youth.*



## **New Name for the Council**

In 2000, members of the *Saskatchewan Interagency Council on Smoking and Health* voted to change the organization's name to the *Saskatchewan Coalition for Tobacco Reduction*. The new name reflected the growing focus on 'tobacco use', and not only smoking.

## **Tobacco Free Saskatchewan Campaign**

The Coalition also joined several health groups to form the *Tobacco Free Saskatchewan Campaign* whose goal was to promote provincial tobacco reduction legislation.

## **New Provincial Legislation**

The Coalition achieved one of its long term goals when, in June, 2001, the provincial *Saskatchewan Tobacco Control Act* was passed. However, the Act stopped short of a 100% ban in public places and allowed smoking in restaurants, bars, billiard halls, bingos, bowling alleys and casinos. From 2002 to 2004, non-smoking areas in these facilities were to increase from 30% to 60%.

The legislation also required a ban on tobacco retail displays which had grown so large they were called "power walls" by the tobacco industry. Saskatchewan's ban on tobacco retail displays was 'precedent-setting' in Canada, and second in the world, after Iceland. Eventually, all Canadian provinces and territories would adopt the law as well as many countries and jurisdictions.

## **Take Five: Practical Strategies in Tobacco Reduction**

In 2001, the Coalition co-hosted the Saskatchewan Tobacco Consultations. Funding was provided by Health Canada, Saskatchewan Health and the Coalition. From this, a three-year business plan was developed including the five strategic areas which formed the basis for the Coalition's work for the next five years:

1. Support and strengthen the Tobacco Control Act
2. Support the enactment of legislated smoke-free public places
3. Support the enactment of legislated smoke-free workplaces
4. Support the enactment of smoke-free schools
5. Minimize the influence of tobacco-industry activities

On March 27-28, 2003, the Coalition hosted a provincial conference, *Take Five: Practical Strategies in Tobacco Reduction*, whose goal was to further collective action on tobacco reduction in Saskatchewan.

## ‘Putting Words into Action’

Following the conference’s success, Health Canada funded a Coalition project, “*Putting Words into Action*”. Its goal was to develop and implement comprehensive strategies to support population-based tobacco reduction. Working Groups addressed five areas:

- *Best practices in tobacco control* – The goal was to provide policymakers with the tools needed to develop effective tobacco reduction strategies. The project provided evidence-based research to show that health dollars spent on best practices in tobacco reduction were the most effective way to reduce tobacco-related deaths. Following a review of the research literature, the top ‘best practices’ in tobacco reduction were identified as:
  - Tobacco taxation
  - Smoke-free public and workplaces.
  - Banning tobacco advertising and promotion
  - Counteradvertising including denormalization of tobacco industry activities

The Coalition used this information to produce its first report on best practices, “*Best Practices in Tobacco Control: A Vision for Saskatchewan*”. Follow-up reports were produced in 2008 and 2013-2014. A PowerPoint presentation was developed to inform Regional Health Boards and a newsletter, *Saskatchewan Achieve*, and handout, *Please support best practices in tobacco control*, were also developed and distributed.

- *Smoke-free workplaces* – This working group did a literature search, developed a list of contacts and investigated other jurisdictions with workplace legislation. Resources and a report were developed.
- *SCTR Website Upgrade* – The website was updated to educate the public and stakeholders about tobacco issues.
- *Tobacco-Free School Zones* – The working group promoted tobacco-free school buildings and grounds with a report, “*Tobacco Free School Zones in Saskatchewan – Protecting the Health of Our Students*”. A network of schools supporting a comprehensive approach to reduction of tobacco use was set up and a policy guide for a Tobacco-free School was developed and distributed. A conference, *In the Zone Tobacco-Free School Zones in Saskatchewan*, was also held.

## Tobacco Industry Opposition

Understanding how the industry worked proved crucial to the Coalition’s work through the years. Information from other jurisdictions including the World Health Organization(WHO) revealed the industry had fought effective tobacco reduction

measures, promoted useless programs and funded ‘front groups’ to carry its message. WHO compared the tobacco epidemic to a communicable disease model with the tobacco industry being the vector.

In 2000, the *Canadian Tobacco Manufacturing Council* promoted its educational program to reduce youth smoking. The Coalition and some teachers and students had concerns about the industry program, *Wise Decisions*. It was not approved for use in Saskatchewan schools.

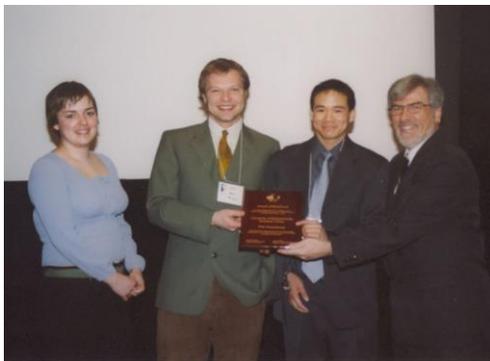
In May 6, 2002, Rothmans Benson & Hedges Inc. legally challenged Saskatchewan’s retail display ban. However, the Supreme Court of Canada struck down the challenge in January, 2005.

The Council was able to help other Canadian provinces and territories and other countries in countering misinformation about the retail display ban.



*A Coalition member and public health nurse with Ottawa University students supporting Saskatchewan’s retail display ban outside the Supreme Court of Canada.*

Around this time, the tobacco industry also began to promote tobacco in Saskatchewan bars using models dressed in tobacco brand colors.



*Students Union accepts award from CCTC*

In 2003, the University of Saskatchewan Students Union(USSU) made the front page of the Saskatoon Star Phoenix when it turned down almost a quarter of a million dollars offered by Imperial Tobacco Canada in a contract to promote tobacco products at concerts at the Union’s bar. “*We’re not in the business of killing people,*” said the USSU.

The Coalition let the Canadian Council for Tobacco Control(CCTC) know about this courageous stand and, in 2003, CCTC presented the Students’ Union with a national award.

## 100% 'Smoke-Free' Public Places

Although Saskatchewan health groups had tried twice to get provincial smoke-free legislation, that goal had not been achieved.



*People for a Smoke-Free Moose Jaw*

A Moose Jaw elementary teacher and her class of students set off a chain reaction around the province. The class encouraged citizens and health groups to form *People for a Smoke-Free Moose Jaw*.

Although the group was unsuccessful at persuading the city to pass a smoke-free bylaw, it bravely collected signatures for a referendum. On October 23, 2003, Moose Jaw citizens voted to become Saskatchewan's first smoke-free city!

Following this, four other Saskatchewan cities, Humboldt, Saskatoon, Yorkton and Prince Albert, also passed smoke-free bylaws. The Coalition assisted in this process by providing research evidence and countering misinformation.

### Heather Crowe's Contribution

Heather Crowe was the Ottawa waitress who died from lung cancer after working for decades in second hand smoke in restaurants. She played an amazing role in helping to achieve smoke-free places. She visited Saskatchewan twice, meeting with city and town councils and the Minister of Labour. Wherever she went, people listened to her story and workers thanked her for taking on the cause of smoke-free workplaces. Unfortunately, Heather did not live to see Saskatchewan workplaces become smoke-free.



*Heather Crowe at the Regina Leader Post, 2003*

## Smoke-free Public Places

# MLAs: Please pass smoke-free legislation now.

Saskatchewan people have asked for and been promised the protection of smoke-free public places by January 1, 2005.

**After extensive public consultation, the legislation is ready to go and sits before the Legislature.**

But today our MLAs are saying passage of the legislation **may be delayed** for further consultation.

Please, MLAs – no further delay on this important health issue !!

Saskatchewan taxpayers have **already paid \$120,000** to have the All Party Committee on Tobacco Control tour the province. The committee met with the public and all stakeholders, and **85 per cent of presentations favoured strong legislation** including smoke-free public places.

The people have been heard and the legislation they asked for is now before the Legislature. It's time to take action, pass the bill and start reducing tobacco-related illness and deaths.

Five Saskatchewan communities, representing a third of the province's population, have already passed smoke-free bylaws at the municipal level.

**That's real leadership.**

We need our MLAs to show the same leadership at the provincial level.

If you are concerned about health and health costs, send your MLA a telephone or email message right away, asking for prompt passage of the current legislation.

Medical Health Officers Council of Saskatchewan • Regina Qr/Appelle Health Region • Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations  
Saskatchewan Public Health Association • Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association

After five Saskatchewan municipalities had passed smoke-free bylaws, the Coalition again recommended provincial legislation be passed since more than 50% of Saskatchewan's population was now protected from second-hand smoke.

A Bill to provide 100% smoke-free public places was introduced in May, 2004, but stalled at Second Reading.

The Coalition drafted a one page advertisement asking the public to call their Member of the Legislative Assembly and encourage passage of the legislation.

On June 14, 2004, the advertisement ran in the Regina Leader Post. It resulted in a wave of phone calls from the public. On June 17, 2004, the legislation was passed.

On January 1, 2005, public places in Saskatchewan became smoke-free!

## **2008 ‘Best Practices’ Report**

In 2008, the Coalition hired a contract researcher to assess and report on tobacco reduction in Saskatchewan. The report made a number of recommendations including smoke-free workplaces, banning smoking in cars with children, banning tobacco sales in pharmacies, mass media campaigns and the development of a comprehensive provincial tobacco reduction strategy.

## **Workplaces**

Although public places had been legislated smoke-free, Saskatchewan workplaces could still allow smoking. The Coalition persevered in promoting smoke-free workplaces over many years and, on May 31, 2009, amendments to the Occupational Health and Safety Regulations came into effect and Saskatchewan workplaces became smoke-free.

## **Further Progress in Tobacco Reduction**

By 2010, the provincial Government had introduced further measures including:

- A ban of outdoor signs promoting tobacco
- A ban of tobacco sales in pharmacies
- A ban of tobacco use on school grounds
- Smoke-free entranceways of public buildings
- Smoke-free common areas in apartments and condos
- Smoke-free vehicles with children present
- Restriction of tobacco sales in a number of locations
- A mass media campaign

## **Recovery of health care costs associated with tobacco**

The Saskatchewan Coalition for Tobacco Reduction strongly supports the provincial Government’s recovery of health care costs related to treating tobacco-related illnesses. Each year, tobacco costs Saskatchewan over a billion dollars in direct and indirect costs with only 18% offset by tobacco tax revenue. The Coalition commends the provincial Government for holding the tobacco industry accountable for the damage its products have caused.

## **2013 ‘Best Practices’ Report**

The Coalition’s third report makes a number of recommendations including:

- Ban smoking at outdoor sporting events, on patios, on children’s playgrounds and nine meters from hospital facilities.
- Reduce availability of tobacco by banning sales in bars, restaurants, post-secondary institutions, temporary outdoor locations and athletic and recreational facilities.
- Maintain tobacco tax at appropriate levels
- Continue to develop mass media campaigns
- Ban flavoured tobacco.
- Increase support for smoking cessation.
- Increase funding for the provincial tobacco reduction strategy.

## Campaigns

Over the years, the Coalition has developed and launched many campaigns. In particular, it has provided leadership in promoting National Non-Smoking Week and World No Tobacco Day.

## Engaging Communities

The Coalition works with communities to develop strategies to reduce tobacco use. In particular, the Coalition has worked with towns and cities to develop smoking bylaws and with First Nations and Métis communities at events such as the following:

- The Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (*First Nations Tobacco Control Strategy, Youth Legislative Assembly*)
- Métis Nation – Saskatchewan (*Back to Batoche, 2010 - 2013*)

The Coalition recognizes and respects the ceremonial use of tobacco.

## Partnering with other health groups

The *Saskatchewan Coalition for Tobacco Reduction* also partners with other groups on a variety of projects. Some of these have included:

- Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (*RNAO National Nursing Best Practice Smoking Cessation Initiative*)
- Non Smokers' Rights Association (*Workshops on second hand smoke in multi-unit dwellings and Current and Emerging Issues on Tobacco Control*)

## Conferences

The *Saskatchewan Coalition for Tobacco Reduction* has provided presentations at National and World Conferences on Tobacco or Health since 2000.

## Tributes and Accolades

The Coalition and its members have received a number of awards and recognitions including.

- 2002 – Queen's Jubilee Medal
- 2003 – Non-Smokers' Rights Association's Award of Merit
- 2005 – Saskatchewan Centennial Medal
- 2005 – Saskatchewan Centennial Volunteer Award
- 2006 - *The Alexander Officer Award*, Canadian Institute of Public Health Inspectors

## Conclusion

The Mission of the *Saskatchewan Coalition for Tobacco Reduction* is:

***To educate, advocate, collaborate and coordinate to achieve a tobacco-free Saskatchewan while recognizing the ceremonial use of tobacco.***

Over the last forty years, the Coalition has led provincial health groups in initiatives that have helped reduce tobacco-related diseases and deaths.

Thanks to the support of the public and the leadership of policy makers, smoking rates have decreased from 45% in 1973 to 19% in 2011!

Many Saskatchewan lives have been saved...