
Tobacco and vaping reduction strategy



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Message from the Honourable Adriana LaGrange Minister of Health

The health and wellbeing of Albertans is a cornerstone for the success and security of our province and requires a comprehensive approach that addresses various factors influencing health, including the use of tobacco and vaping products.

Although significant efforts to reduce the consumption of tobacco in the province have been successful, high rates of smoking and tobacco use continue to negatively affect the health of Albertans and create significant burden on the health care system. Addiction to tobacco products is the leading cause of preventable illness, disability and death in Alberta, yet the prevalence of smoking in Alberta, while having dropped to 11.5 per cent in 2021, remains too high. Each year, over 4,000 Albertans die from tobacco-related disease. Tobacco contributes to the development of all major chronic diseases and is the only consumer product that causes disease, disability and death when used exactly as intended.

The emergence of vaping products within the last decade has presented a new method of consuming nicotine, and since their introduction to the market, many Albertans, particularly youth, have begun using them with accelerating frequency. While the use of vaping products is known to be associated with risks such as lung injury, nicotine poisoning and addiction, long term health impacts such as the inhalation of chemicals like formaldehydes, which form when vape liquid is heated, are still being studied. This challenging and evolving public health issue is a priority for the Government of Alberta to ensure the future wellbeing of Albertans, particularly those who are young.

This five year Tobacco and Vaping Reduction Strategy builds upon the successes of Alberta's previous tobacco reduction strategies dating back to 2002 and strives towards further achievements. It reviews and builds on the outcomes of the extensive work in legislative changes, health promotion, and collaborative social action in order to provide insight and structure for where we will need to go next to achieve our reduction objectives.

This Strategy also recognizes the fundamental value that key community partners hold in these efforts and is designed to ensure collective collaboration and coordinated partnerships will impact, strengthen, and influence future initiatives, programs and legislative frameworks.

Government, healthcare providers, stakeholders, educators, and communities need to continue to work towards reducing the burden from the negative impacts of tobacco and vaping products use. As we work towards creating a healthier province, we can pave the way for a healthier future, fostering thriving communities and enabling Albertans to lead fulfilling lives.

Adriana LaGrange
Minister of Health



Ceremonial tobacco

Since time immemorial, our Creation Stories have told us that Tobacco is sacred and requires respect. Our Holy Bundles have guided us in the growing, harvesting, preparing and use of Tobacco for ceremonies. This is not the same as today's commercial tobacco, which contains harmful additives. This colonial practice represents the misappropriation of a highly respected sacred plant and has caused great harm to our People. We need to revitalize and strengthen our cultural use of sacred tobacco by returning to its original use, empowering our Elders and Youth to connect, learn about the sacredness of tobacco and its proper place in our ceremonies and our lives.

Elder Treffrey Deerfoot,
Guiding Knowledge Keeper, Keep Tobacco
Sacred Collaboration

The Government of Alberta recognizes and affirms the historic, cultural, and spiritual value of ceremonial tobacco. As such, provincial legislation does not restrict it, nor impede the rights of those Indigenous Peoples who use ceremonial tobacco in traditional spiritual or cultural practices. Use of tobacco by First Nations, Métis and Inuit for ceremonial purposes remains protected under the *Tobacco, Smoking and Vaping Reduction Act*.

Alberta Health's tobacco control and reduction efforts focus exclusively on commercial tobacco. Commercial tobacco can be defined as "harmful products that are made and sold by tobacco companies." Commercial tobacco includes cigarettes, cigars, chewing tobacco, pipe tobacco and other products. The definition does not include "traditional tobacco" used by First Nations and Metis groups for ceremonial purposes.

Throughout the Tobacco and Vaping Reduction Strategy, in all instances in which tobacco and tobacco products are referenced or Alberta Health seeks a reduction in the use of tobacco, commercial tobacco is the focus of those activities.





Introduction

The Government of Alberta's *Creating Tobacco-free Futures: Alberta's Strategy to Prevent and Reduce Tobacco Use, 2012-2022* (Tobacco-free Strategy) outlined steps to help people quit using tobacco, reduce harmful second-hand smoke exposure, and make tobacco products less enticing for youth. A new strategy is needed to address ongoing and emerging issues.

Addiction to tobacco products is the leading cause of preventable illness, disability, and death in Alberta. In 2021, 11.5 percent of Albertans acknowledged they were daily or occasional smokers. The ongoing prevalence of tobacco use results in considerable costs to the healthcare system and personal lives.

The emergence and accelerated use of vaping products in the last decade, particularly by youth, has raised further public health concerns. While vaping has been demonstrated to result in a number of negative outcomes, there are still unknown consequences of this practice that require study and attention.

The Government of Alberta has remained proactive in trying to reduce the health harms of these products. *The Tobacco, Smoking and Vaping Reduction Act* and regulation, which came into force on July 31, 2021, include enforceable restrictions on the possession, promotion, display, sale, and use of tobacco and vaping products. Additionally, the new laws include fines for violations, prevention of sales of tobacco and vaping products in vending machines and temporary locations, and expansion of the categorization of smoke-free and vape-free areas, especially at places frequented by children and youth.

The Tobacco and Vaping Reduction Strategy incorporates vaping products and ensures the objectives for tobacco and vaping reduction are effectively responsive to a changing landscape. It outlines a provincial governance structure to facilitate the development of initiatives, reports, and recommendations for legislative consideration in the future.



Health equity

The prevalence of tobacco and vaping product use is not uniform amongst different groups of people in the population, and this imbalance can be linked to health and social inequities. Alberta Health acknowledges the disproportionate use of tobacco and its resulting negative impacts, including higher levels of disease, disability and death, are influenced by a number of factors, including:

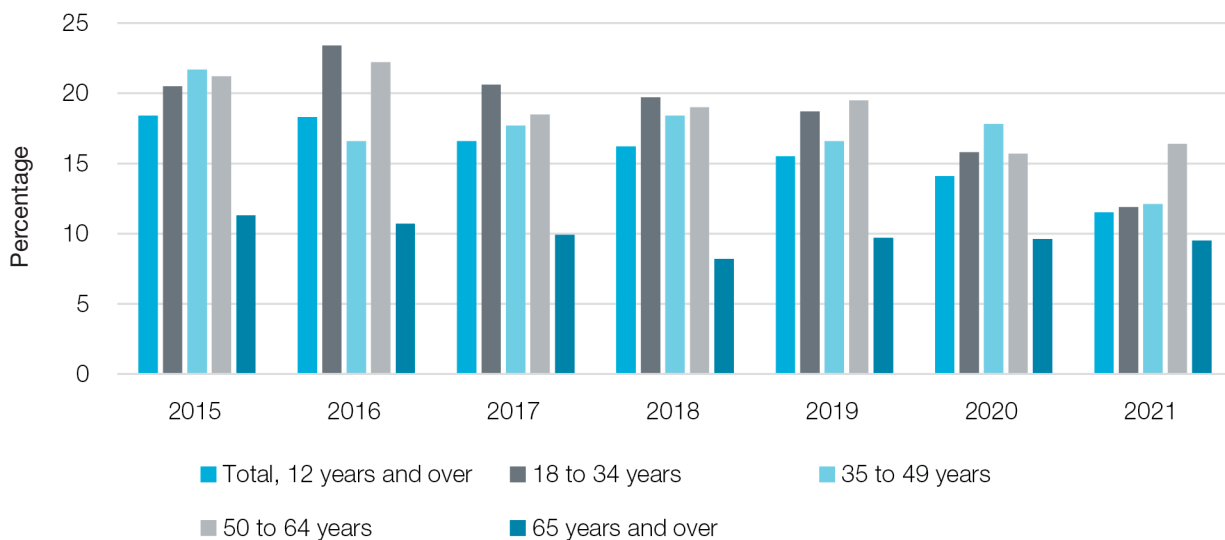
- Tailored tobacco industry marketing and advertising targets some groups and communities;
- Discrimination, poverty, and other social conditions are associated with higher rates of tobacco use; and
- Some population groups experience barriers to healthcare, treatment and cessation support.

The complex structures of disparities are based on a number of influences, including where people live, their employment status and security, and social and demographic factors such as race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, disability status, level of education and income.

Alberta Health commits to recognizing and considering health equity as a fundamental value when developing future legislation, policies, and programs to reduce tobacco and vaping product use.



ALBERTA - CURRENT SMOKER, DAILY OR OCCASIONAL



Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey, Table 13-10-0096-10 Smokers, by age group



Tobacco and vaping trends

Tobacco use

The collective efforts by the Government of Alberta and its health and community partners in the last decade have resulted in significant reductions in our provincial smoking rates.

Vaping product use

The introduction of vaping products in the last decade has produced significant numbers of users, particularly youth. From 2013 to 2020, the number of Albertans ages 15 to 19 to have ever used a vaping product increased from 18.8% to 35.2%.

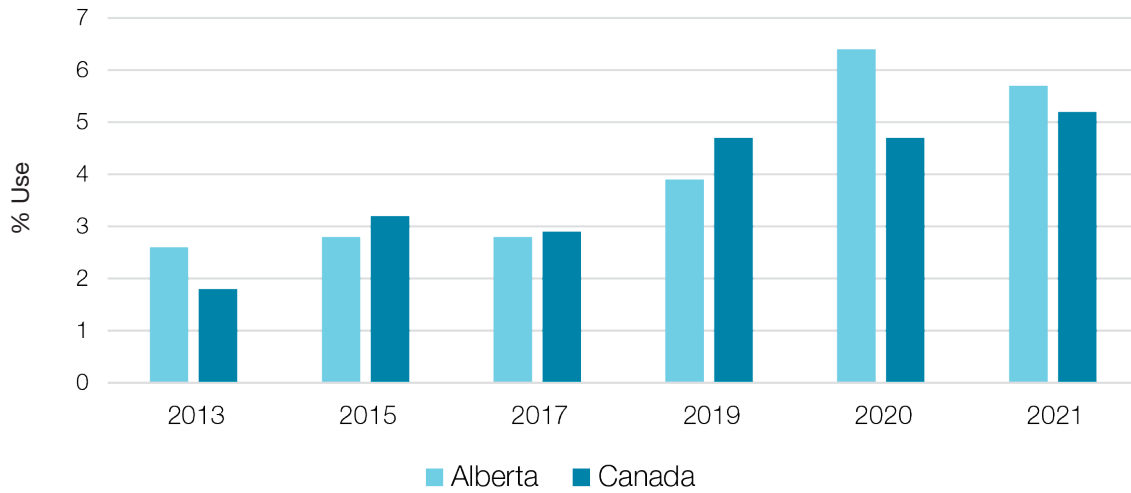
Additionally, Albertans are increasing their regular use of vaping products. From 2013 to 2021, the number of Albertans over 15 years who have used a vaping product within the last 30 days rose from 2.6% to 5.7%.



From 2015 to 2021, overall daily or occasional smoking rates for Albertans aged 12 years and over fell from 18.4% to 11.5%. This constitutes a 37.5% decrease in smoking rates in Alberta.

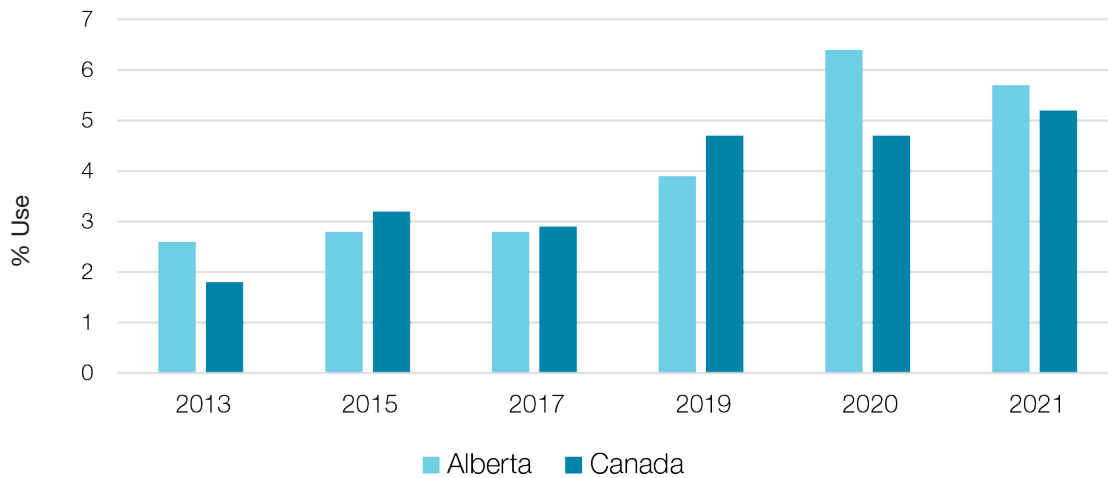


PREVALENCE OF PAST 30 DAY USE OF E-CIGARETTES AMONG PERSONS AGED 15+



Source: Canadian Tobacco, Alcohol and Drugs Survey (CTADS), 2013, 2015, 2017; Canadian Tobacco and Nicotine Survey (CTNS, 2019, 2020)

PREVALENCE OF EVER USE OF E-CIGARETTES AMONG YOUTH AGED 15-19



Source: Canadian Tobacco, Alcohol and Drugs Survey (CTADS), 2013, 2015, 2017; Canadian Tobacco and Nicotine Survey (CTNS, 2019, 2020)



Impacts of tobacco and vaping products

Health impacts of tobacco

Using tobacco products is directly linked to many negative health outcomes, which include:

- Lung cancer;
- Other types of cancer, including throat, mouth, bladder, kidney, liver, and stomach cancer;
- Cardiovascular disease, including heart and peripheral vascular disease and stroke;
- Respiratory disease such as chronic bronchitis and emphysema;
- Pregnancy complications, leading to a number of serious health problems for the mother and baby, including low birth weight, premature birth, and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS); and
- Additional health problems, including decreased fertility, cataracts, osteoporosis, and rheumatoid arthritis.

Health impacts of vaping

Despite being acknowledged as less harmful than tobacco use by the Government of Canada, Public Health Agency of England, and the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, vaping can result in a number of negative health outcomes, which include:

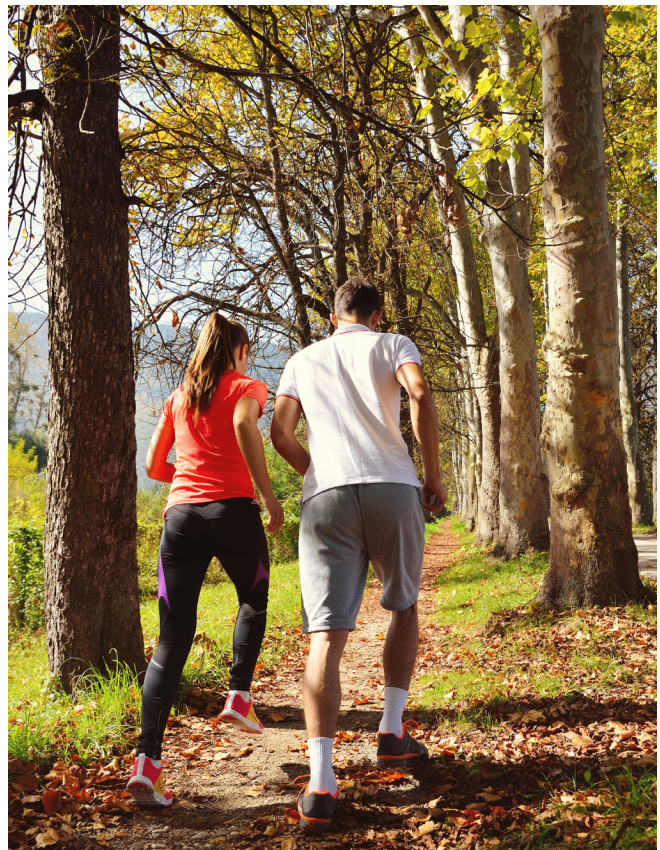
- Lung irritation, inflammation, and injury, as well as conditions such as bronchitis and lung infections;
- Heart disease, including heart attack and stroke;
- Addiction to nicotine, which can be harmful to both physical and mental health and lead to difficulty in quitting and withdrawal symptoms;
- Other health problems including dry mouth, throat irritation, and headaches; and
- Long-term effects including diabetes and heart disease.

Vaping can model and renormalize smoking behaviour among youth. Some studies have found an association between smoking and vaping, suggesting that young people who vape have an increased risk of smoking.

It is important to note that the use of vaping products is a comparatively new phenomenon, and additional research will assist with fully understanding the long-term health effects associated with the use of these products. The evidence to date suggests that vaping is not without health risks, and that it may be particularly dangerous for young people and pregnant women.

Healthcare costs

Beyond health impacts, the economic burden of tobacco and vaping use continues to affect Albertans through the costs associated with treating negative health outcomes. The most cost-effective approach to treating health issues related to tobacco and vaping is through its prevention, reduction and cessation.





Illegal tobacco use and sales

Alberta's illicit tobacco trade generates a variety of complications that impact health and the economy. These include:

- Increased availability of untaxed products leads to increased consumption and its associated health issues;
- Increased health issues in some populations who are more likely to use these illicit products;
- Illegal market activity, such as smuggling and counterfeiting, can lead to further criminal activity and reduced monitoring and control of the market;
- Untaxed products decrease potential provincial revenue; and
- Negative impacts to legitimate business activity.

Alberta Treasury Board and Finance is responsible for the *Tobacco Tax Act* and leads collective Government of Alberta action on matters related to the illegal market. Support for this work includes Alberta Health's funding of tobacco and vaping enforcement programs.

Environmental impacts

Cigarette waste is a significant environmental problem that has far-reaching impacts on the ecosystem. Cigarette butts are the most common form of litter worldwide, containing hazardous chemicals such as nicotine, cadmium, lead, and arsenic that can leach into the soil and water, posing a threat to wildlife and vegetation. Moreover, cigarette waste can take up to 10 years to decompose, and the filters, made from plastic fibers, can persist in the environment for hundreds of years. Cigarette waste can also cause fires that destroy homes, communities, habitats and endanger wildlife.

Vaping products similarly present an environmental risk. Vape devices and their components, such as batteries and cartridges, often end up in landfills, where they release harmful chemicals into the soil and water. Additionally, the production and disposal of these devices require significant energy and resources, contributing to greenhouse gas emissions and environmental pollution. Moreover, the use of vaping products has led to an increase in littering and improper disposal, which can harm wildlife and disrupt ecosystems.



Vision

All Albertans have the opportunity to experience better health and wellbeing free from the health harms attributable to the use of commercial tobacco, vaping and emerging tobacco and nicotine products.



Objectives

1. Acknowledge the negative health and financial impacts of commercial tobacco and vaping on Albertans and affirm a commitment to reducing their use.
2. Identify strategic directions as a framework for collective and collaborative action with stakeholders and key partners.
3. Facilitate the development of a collective body of key partners with a mandate to assess provincial tobacco and vaping reduction, prevention and cessation efforts and provide recommendations for future action.

Strategic directions

The following strategic directions are sourced from the 2012 Tobacco-free Strategy and have proven to be an effective approach. These remain to be the basis of future objectives and are applicable to vaping reduction efforts. They are grounded in these guiding principles:

- Utilizing proven tobacco reduction practices;
- Understanding and addressing equity and health disparities related to commercial tobacco and vaping products and the factors that cause these disparities;
- Supporting individual and community capacity;
- Relying on evidence to shape policy direction; and
- Integrating promising practices to promote innovation.

PREVENTION

Goal: Help Albertans, particularly youth, avoid using tobacco and vaping products.

Public education

Public health campaigns raise awareness, educate, and promote behavioural change. A public health campaign will be developed that will include messaging on the health harms of tobacco and vaping products and what restrictions are currently outlined in legislation that relate to the provision of vaping products to youth.

Tobacco and vaping taxation

Taxation is an effective tool for motivating people to quit using tobacco products. The Government of Alberta will continue to evaluate the effectiveness of current tobacco and vaping taxation and consider this method as a means to promoting public health.

PROTECTION

Goal: To protect Albertans from the harmful effects of tobacco and vaping products.

Online sales guidance for Alberta retailers

The *Tobacco, Smoking and Vaping Reduction Act* Enforcement team retailer handbook provides retailers with necessary information to ensure compliance with provincial legislation. As online sales of vaping products are increasing, the retailer handbook will be expanded to include information related to the sale and distribution of product through online sales.

School vaping guidance document

An evidence-informed guidance document for school officials and teachers will be developed, leveraging existing resources, to address the rapidly increasing use of vaping products by Alberta's student population.

Enforcement

Continuing to enforce the *Tobacco, Smoking and Vaping Reduction Act* and regulation is a key component towards reaching Alberta's tobacco and vaping reduction goals. Enforcing Alberta's tobacco and vaping laws advances public health goals and protects youth from the potential harms. Recognizing the fundamental role of retailer education, compliance checks and violation penalties in law enforcement, the enforcement team will continue to be supported to conduct these activities.

Enforcement expansion

A review of the current mandate of the enforcement team will be conducted with consideration to expand enforcement in the areas of access to vaping products on school property and the sale and distribution of illegal tobacco products and promotional activities.

CESSATION

Goal: To maximize cessation initiatives and expand coverage to include vaping products.

Tobacco cessation

Diligence is needed to ensure ongoing tobacco cessation initiatives are effective and supported. The Government of Alberta will continue to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of current provincial cessation programs and investigate effective approaches to maximize their success, while ensuring priority for population groups that are disproportionately affected by tobacco health harms.

Vaping cessation

As vaping product use becomes more common, more Albertans may seek support in their attempts to quit vaping. As such, potential vaping cessation opportunities will be investigated for their effectiveness and applicability with Alberta.

KNOWLEDGE TRANSLATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Goal: To support linkages between prevention, protection and cessation efforts and increase transparency of tobacco and vaping product reduction initiatives.

Establish a provincial committee on tobacco and vaping

The Government of Alberta will strike a provincial advisory committee with the following mandate:

- Monitor tobacco and vaping use in Alberta;
- Develop performance measures, milestones, and evaluation criteria;
- Report on milestones of collective tobacco and vaping reduction efforts;
- Develop policy recommendations including goals and potential future legislative amendments;
- Ensure diverse and comprehensive representation that will act as a resource for technical expertise and inclusive perspectives; and
- Under the direction of Alberta Health, engage in collaborative initiatives to facilitate tobacco and vaping reduction across the province.

Monitoring and evaluation

Alberta Health will work with stakeholders to surveil and monitor tobacco and vaping use rates, health and financial impacts and the ongoing status of tobacco and vaping product use in the province.

Performance measures, targets and evaluation

Alberta Health will work with the Provincial Committee on Tobacco and Vaping to develop a series of performance measures and targets to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of provincial tobacco and vaping product reduction initiatives through monitoring, analyzing and evaluating progress in achieving public health objectives. A health equity lens will be used during evaluations.



Moving forward

Significant reductions in tobacco use have occurred since the inception of the Alberta Tobacco Reduction Strategy in 2002 and the Tobacco-Free Strategy in 2012. The Tobacco and Vaping Reduction Strategy, developed in the tradition of its predecessors and with a similar intent, will ensure that Alberta continues the essential work of promoting the health and wellbeing of Albertans until 2028.

By building on accomplishments of the Government of Alberta and its partners through cooperation, education and enforcement, this Strategy provides direction that will further help Albertans prevent, reduce or cease their use of tobacco and vaping products, lead fulfilling lives, and foster thriving communities.



Appendix 1 – Provincial gains in tobacco reduction

Creating Tobacco-free Futures: Alberta's Strategy to Prevent and Reduce Tobacco Use, 2012-2022

The 2012-2022 Tobacco-free Strategy was an expansion of the 2002 Alberta Tobacco Reduction Strategy. The 10-year plan built upon previous tobacco reduction successes and continued to make progress in reducing the health harms of tobacco use in Alberta. It included a variety of initiatives to support Albertans lead a tobacco-free life by helping people take steps to quit using tobacco, reduce exposure to second-hand tobacco smoke, make commercial tobacco products less enticing for youth and establish performance targets for smoking prevalence, tobacco sales and tobacco quit attempts.

The Tobacco-free Strategy contributed significantly to the achievement of Alberta's public health goals. It outlined the reduction objectives through a number of targets.

Objective	2010 Rate	2022 Target	Alberta Actual Rates
Reduce smoking prevalence – Albertans Ages 15 and over	19%	12%	12 years and over: 11.5% in 2021 (Statistics Canada: Smokers by Age Group, 2021)
Reduce smoking prevalence – Albertans Ages 12 to 19	13%	6%	Grades 7-9: 0.9% in 2021-2022 Grades 10–12: 2.4% in 2021-2022 (Statistics Canada: Detailed tables for the Canadian Student Tobacco, Alcohol and Drugs Survey 2021-2022)
Reduce smoking prevalence – Albertans Ages 20 to 24	30%	20%	20-24 years: 5.4% in 2021 (Statistics Canada: Canadian Tobacco and Nicotine Survey 2021 detailed tables)
Maternal Smoking – Reduce prevalence among pregnant women	17%	11%	9.9% in 2017 (Alberta Health Services: Looking back: Commercial Tobacco Reduction in Alberta Progress Report)
Reduce estimated per capita tobacco sales by 50 per cent	1491 units	745 units	656 units in 2021-2022 (Alberta Treasury Board and Finance: unpublished data)
Tobacco Quit Rates - Increase the proportion of daily smokers 15 years of age and older making one or more quit attempts	49%	65%	51.4% in 2017 (Alberta Health Services: Looking back: Commercial Tobacco Reduction in Alberta Progress Report (unpublished))

Legislation

The Tobacco-free Strategy recommended legislative amendments to reduce tobacco use in Alberta, a number of which have been applied in legislation:

- Ban tobacco sales to minors
- Ban flavoured tobacco
- Protect children in vehicles from second-hand smoke
- Expand the smoke free areas to include hospital, school, and childcare properties
- Expand smoke free areas in outdoor areas frequented by children including playgrounds, splash pads and skate parks

These successes are a significant achievement. The collaboration of Alberta Health and stakeholders, as reflected in the Tobacco-free Strategy, has directly contributed to improving the health of Albertans.



Appendix 2 – Acknowledgements

Alberta Health appreciates the many organizations and individuals who contributed to the Tobacco and Vaping Reduction Strategy:

- Action on Smoking & Health
- Alberta Blue Cross
- Alberta Education, Government of Alberta
- Alberta Education Youth Advisory Committee
- Alberta Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis (AGLC)
- Alberta Health First Nations Health Advisory Committee
- Alberta Health Services
- Alberta Lung
- Alberta Medical Association
- Alberta Policy Coalition for Chronic Disease Prevention
- Alberta Public Health Association
- Alberta School Boards Association
- Alberta School Councils Association
- Canadian Cancer Society
- Edmonton Police Services (EPS)
- Heart & Stroke - Alberta and NWT
- Indigenous Relations, Government of Alberta
- Jobs, Economy, and Northern Development, Government of Alberta
- Metis Nation of Alberta
- Metis Settlements of Alberta
- Municipal Affairs, Government of Alberta
- Treasury Board and Finance, Government of Alberta

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