



February 25-28, 2005

**knowledge + passion =  
action**

**national forum on youth and**

**young adult tobacco control issues**



**RESPECT**



**LISTEN**

**UNDERSTAND**

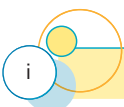


**COMMUNICATE**

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The National Forum on Youth and Young Adult Tobacco Control Issues is a Health Canada funded event. The opinions expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect those of Health Canada.

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## **KNOWLEDGE + PASSION = ACTION**

The Story of the *National Forum on Youth and Young Adult Tobacco Control Issues*, 2005

### **INTRODUCTION**

This report has been created for the youth and young adult participants of the *National Forum on Youth and Young Adult Tobacco Control Issues: Knowledge + Passion = Action*. It is a report that attempts to capture the spirit, energy and diversity of the *Forum*; maintaining as much as possible an accurate reflection of the challenges and triumphs experienced at the event. Finding a respectful balance between the youth and young adults who took part in the *Forum*, their needs, desires and abilities was something that challenged both organizers of the event and the writers of this report. This challenge, it is hoped, has been met, and it is with the deepest gratitude that thanks are given to everyone who attended. Thanks are also given to the provincial and territorial governments for their participation on the Forum Advisory Committee, their financial assistance and help with recruitment, and to members of the Youth Action Committee (YAC) for taking part in planning and hosting this wonderful experience.



### **THE NATIONAL FORUM ON TOBACCO CONTROL ISSUES**

Imagine a gathering of over 140 people between the ages of 16 and 29 in a downtown Ottawa hotel over a weekend in late February of 2005. Imagine this to be a place where these people are able to learn from one another by sharing their experiences and expertise in a safe and respectful environment. This was the place created at the *National Forum*.



It is true that young Canadians make up a large portion of the smoking statistics in this country. It is also true however, that there are a lot of young Canadians who care about tobacco control and are taking action to reduce the incidences of tobacco use for everyone. The *National Forum* brought together many of these young people, giving them a place where they could discuss tobacco control and its related topics with their peers. The *Forum* was not only a fantastic chance for young people to talk about the National Framework for Action on Youth and Young Adults and Tobacco Control [a plan of action designed especially for youth and young adults by the Tobacco Control Liaison Committee (TCLC) and Health Canada], but also a great way for youth and young adults from across the country to learn new skills and discuss what is being done in their communities.

*"The tobacco industry wants to recruit you as a future smoker – we want to recruit you for your knowledge and your passion. Our bottom line is a better future for all Canadians."*

– Robert Thibault, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health

The *Forum* was designed for youth and young adults, and young people were included in all aspects of the event. Members of the YAC were heavily involved in planning the *Forum*, moderating the workshops and taking the lead on many of the icebreakers and reflective activities. It was amazing to see how the motivation and energy of these youth rubbed off on everyone. Just being able to see how much they were contributing to the event was





empowering, and helped a lot of other young people at the *Forum* realize they could get involved too.

Those taking part in organizing this event felt very strongly that a wide range of people and experiences should be represented at the *Forum*. Keeping this in mind, 60 youth (between the ages of 16 and 18) and 82 young adult participants (between the ages of 19 and 29) from every province and territory were brought together to share and learn with one another over a three day weekend. Health Canada also thought it would be a good idea to have as many different experiences with tobacco use present at this *Forum* as possible, so that smokers, non-smokers, former smokers and users of other tobacco products were invited. Having so many perspectives on the issue made the *Forum* a well-balanced event, allowing for a lot of first-hand experiences to be shared on many issues related to tobacco control.



## HIGH-ENERGY

### A CONFERENCE FOR YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS

Why host a conference? An atmosphere like the one created at the *Forum* promotes an energy that can get everyone motivated and focussed on connecting with one another about projects and ideas. It allows everyone to make links with people they wouldn't normally have linked with, and gives them the opportunity to prove once more that young people DO care about their health and the health of their country. A conference like this empowers people to be a part of the change they want to see in the world, not to mention that it's pretty exciting to hang out with a bunch of really cool strangers (who become friends) for a weekend.

*We're the ones who will inherit this land in a few short years and the decisions being made today directly affect our future more than anyone else's. So we deserve to have a say."*

– Simon Jackson



Because smoking rates among First Nations and Inuit peoples are more than twice that of the rest of the country, organizers felt it was important to have a strong Aboriginal presence at the *Forum*. The Forum Advisory Committee set a goal of having 20 Aboriginal participants, and in the end, with the support of several Aboriginal organizations and other groups working with First Nation, Inuit and Métis peoples, the *Forum* saw a total of 44 people who identified themselves as being Aboriginal attend the event.

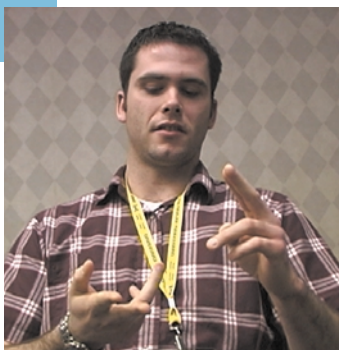
### **ROLES OF YOUTH AT THE *FORUM***

In keeping with the idea that young people should play an active role in the *Forum* as it unfolded, they were in the middle of this high-energy event. Young members of the organizing team helped out by greeting the arriving participants, looking out for them during the conference, and helping them get to the airport on time for the trip home. The team was noticeable throughout the weekend, encouraging participants to take advantage of every available opportunity to network and share experiences with each other.

Young people also took a lead role in delivering keynote speeches, presenting workshops and being involved with the panel discussions. Those young people who were not a part of delivering the contents of the weekend were able to show off their wisdom by participating in the workshop sessions.

*"We need to make our voices heard, that's how we create change."*

– Simon Jackson



## KNOWLEDGE: WORKSHOP SESSIONS

Much information was shared over the course of the weekend. Sessions on different tobacco control related topics were held so that everyone could have the opportunity to gain more knowledge and a broader perspective. Sessions like *Tobacco 101*, *The Tobacco Industry and You*, *Advocacy in Action*, *Stars & Bars*, *Advocacy 101* and *Guerrilla Tactics* are examples of the many sessions that were offered. The topics of these workshops were focussed on major categories: the importance of networking and working together; the appreciation of a cross-Canada perspective; facts and information on tobacco and tobacco control; passion and action. These categories were reinforced and built on in as many ways as possible during the *Forum*, not only through the teachings of the sessions.

Workshop sessions on tobacco control issues were broken up by snack breaks and opportunities to mingle. A video “speaker’s corner” gave participants the chance to speak their minds (and be recorded!)



There is so much to know about tobacco control, and a weekend is not enough time to go over it all, but the *Forum* succeeded in covering a lot. Many of the facts and statistics associated with tobacco use (usage rates, quit rates, diseases etc.) could be considered general knowledge. Because of this, some people thought there was too much emphasis on statistics and that it was pretty dry, but others thought it was useful to get a review of this information. Many were shocked by the actual statistics, especially those concerning people who are dying from tobacco related illnesses. People also learned about some of the tactics used by the tobacco industry so they can keep a market for the future. Ideas on the best methods of tobacco use prevention, alternative ways of quitting smoking, the impacts of

second-hand smoke, and advocacy among peers and communities were talked about from a number of viewpoints. Having so many of these voices in one place contributed to the success of the *Forum*.



## **PASSION: WHAT DO WE REALLY CARE ABOUT?**

The *Forum* wasn't just about listening to what other people had to say. Participants had the opportunity to talk about which issues of tobacco control they really cared about; where their true passions on the subject lay. They came up with a number of great ideas on ways to denormalize tobacco. People at the *Forum* felt extremely passionate when speaking out about the tobacco industry, believing that many of the tactics used in targeting youth and young adults were unfair and should be exposed. They thought that there should be a total ban on 'power walls' in stores, and that Canada has a responsibility to help developing countries with their tobacco issues, because this really is a global issue and as a country, we need to be looking for ways to support global solutions.

*"It's great we're all here today, not all countries are so lucky. Some countries don't have a single person working in tobacco control, we have hundreds."*

– Trevor Haché

*"I don't have any problem with women looking healthy and attractive – I do have a problem with women pimping cigarettes".*

– Presenter

The majority of people at the *Forum* agreed that more work needs to be done in the areas of prevention and cessation, especially when looking at more effective ways of keeping tobacco out of the hands of minors in the first place. Creating and maintaining smoke-free spaces was also a topic that was important to most everyone who came to the *Forum*. They felt that not having any place to smoke was a great deterrent. If they're not allowed to do it anywhere,





how are they going to be able to smoke? None of this can happen however, without tougher legislation and enforcement.

Education was also a passion; it was felt that educating people about the media traps used by the tobacco industry could help young people avoid being manipulated. If young people are given the opportunity to develop media literacy and critical thinking skills, they'll be much better equipped to notice if they are being taken advantage of. Participants also felt that it isn't enough to simply tell people to quit smoking. It is important for those people attempting to quit to know what alternatives and resources

are available to them. Thus, getting more information about the programs that are out there into the communities is something that many people feel is essential.

*"We do make our own choices but we're influenced by what we see and experience."*

– Participant

These passions were demonstrated repeatedly throughout the weekend, and not only in the participants' willingness to attend sessions and absorb new ideas. Their presence at the *Forum* spoke highly of their passion for the subject of tobacco control. A person could feel the energy pouring from each participant, leaking out into their words and ideas, spreading to each other, creating a buzz that lasted the entire weekend.

## 2015: A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

The last day of the *Forum* was treated as a 'sounding board' where people sat together and talked about their ideas for future action. Participants developed a vision of 2015. They talked of a time when it will "be very uncool to smoke" because smoking will no longer be socially acceptable. In ten years, they see Canada as being completely smoke-free,





*"My vision for 2015 is that smoking rates and other addictions, will be drastically reduced in First Nations communities because we finally got serious about dealing with the root causes of these addictions."*

– Sounding Board Session

including all First Nations and Inuit communities. They envision a future where power walls are banned, and smoking around children won't happen, where "everyone will be better educated about smoking", and "we won't need 'no smoking' signs". They see a time when everyone makes healthier choices. The youth and young adults of the *Forum* discussed a number of excellent ways to make their visions a reality, including using peer-to-peer role modeling to help "young people create change and [make] choices" and updating the *Tobacco Act* to protect people's rights as non-smokers. They also thought that promoting the use of alternative products to reduce harm, and better collaboration and communication between federal, provincial and territorial governments would help them realize their visions.



*"Don't forget there's another generation coming up behind you, 4 and 5 year olds, so you're fighting to make things better for them."*

– Heather Crowe

## EVALUATIONS

At the end of the *Forum*, participants were given the chance to fill out an evaluation form, giving the organizers feedback on all aspects of the event. Many took advantage of this opportunity, and gave their opinion on everything from their favourite (and least favourite)



part of the *Forum*, whether or not they felt safe, respected, and comfortable, and what they thought should be changed (or kept the same) for next time. The evaluation forms collected showed that the *Forum* was a great success and that many of the goals of the event were met. For more on the evaluation results, please see the attached Evaluation Report.

## INSPIRATION

Hearing Simon Jackson share his story of how he made a difference in his community, his province, and his country empowered many of the people in the audience. His triumphs in helping to save the Spirit Bear encouraged the growth of participant's enthusiasm, and they promised to carry his message home. As Simon Jackson showed everyone, one person *can* make a *very* big difference.



Heather Crowe was also a guest speaker at the *Forum*. As a non-smoker with a tobacco-related illness, her story was powerful to hear. She is the face to all of the statistics that were given over the weekend. Hearing her story firsthand gave the crowd another reason to keep working in the area of tobacco control.

*"Parts made me so angry. People like Heather are dying because of second-hand smoke."*

– Participant

This forum allowed participants to share with one another their drive, determination and concern for this important global issue. What is most exciting though is that no matter what their age, their culture or their status as a smoker, non-smoker or former smoker, everyone had the same common interest concerning tobacco use. This unity, motivation, energy and support people received from their fellow participants created hope for a lot of people that they will succeed in their tobacco control work.

Not every single moment of the weekend was spent locked in a room listening to a presenter. There were countless opportunities for people to have fun and enjoy themselves.



A Burundian drumming group, **Remesha Drums**, came one evening and gave an incredibly energetic show. Several people from the audience got up to dance, and even more were banging on their chairs and tables to the beat. A special presentation by the members of **SWAT** (breakdancers) was another opportunity for participants to have some fun and see yet another unique approach to promoting a healthy, smoke-free lifestyle. This group of talented

young men from British Columbia travel to different communities across the country, taking their message and some fantastic hip hop dance moves with them. Many of the young people could be seen trying to snap pictures of the performance, and others were clapping their hands to the beat, or bobbing their heads in time to the music.

During free time, participants were given the chance to explore some of the shops and sights of downtown Ottawa. For some people, this was their first visit to the capital, so being able to see the Parliament Buildings and skate on the Rideau Canal was a special experience for them. On the last evening, dinner was held at a nearby restaurant, allowing everyone a break from the hotel food, while offering them the chance to socialize with one another in a different atmosphere.

As Simon Jackson said, just one person, just one voice can make all the difference in the world. Can you imagine how much difference everyone could make? There were 142 participants at the *National Forum*. That's 142 opportunities to be a part of the solution, 142 opportunities to make a powerful change. Using what they brought to the event and what they learned there, combined with the energy experienced in that hotel, each of these 142 participants are clearly ready to (continue to) take action.

What was the best part of the *Forum*? Well, everyone had different opinions of what they did and did not like. Workshop sessions that were interactive and engaging, like *Prevention Still Matters*, were well received. Presenters who listened and responded to participants' thoughts, ideas, questions and concerns, while making their





information relevant and easy to apply were appreciated. Presenters who were seen as being ‘real’, like Heather Crowe and Simon Jackson were well liked. These people were able to relate their information to real situations the audience could understand.

*"It's not about creating laws that tell people they can't smoke....it's about making them not want to smoke."*

– Participant



Simon Jackson’s keynote speech was a huge hit with everyone. A couple of people wrote on their evaluation forms that Simon was “wicked” and “inspirational”, and many people talked about how excited they were after his presentation.

Another presentation that got a lot of positive feedback was the *Northern Lights: Young People Making it Happen* presentation. It was impressive to see that though their community was really small, people still cared enough to make a difference, and they were making change happen. It was also important to see how young people were at the centre of making this change. This group made a lot of participants think about the power they have, and what they can do back home.



As with everything, there were pieces of the *Forum* that didn’t go so well. Some of the presentations, it was felt, were too fact-based and didn’t allow for enough interaction, or participation from people who went to the session. Though these sessions were good at giving information on the issue, they didn’t allow enough time for people to share what they thought about the issue, which was unfortunate as a lot of people had a lot of excellent things to say. You can imagine though, that presenters would have had a difficult time giving brand new, never-heard-of-before information. Tobacco control is such a public issue that it’s hard to bring up points that haven’t already been covered. One person wrote in their evaluation form that the language of some presentations was “difficult for youth”, indicating that these presentations were directed at a different age group

than what was at the event. Considering that this *Forum* was for youth and young adults, it's unfortunate that these presentations couldn't have been more tailored to the audience.

Because there was such a huge age range present at the *Forum*, it was difficult to make and keep a common climate of respect for everyone. Some of the older people in attendance had some issues with the check-in and check-out policy that *Forum* organizers had, saying that they felt disrespected by the rules they were asked to follow. With such a huge age (and maturity) gap between participants, it was difficult to make sure that everyone felt respected and had their needs met. It was important for those involved in planning the conference that everyone be asked to abide by the same rules for the three days to ensure that the younger participants didn't feel left out, and the older participants didn't feel overly controlled. Most people understood this idea, but some of the older young adults weren't comfortable with having to sign themselves in and out, and felt it was disrespectful of the conference planners to ask that they abide by the same rules as everyone else. Part of this could have been avoided by being clearer with the expectations of all participants from the start of the event, and making sure that all participants understood them. This sort of feedback is important to get so that the same thing doesn't occur at future events. This attempt to make everyone feel respected and equal was an important part of the *Forum*.

**Diversity can be challenging but it's worth it.**



## **ACTION: THE SUM OF KNOWLEDGE + PASSION**

Many people wrote in their evaluation form that they were ready and willing to start taking action back home, or continue in their efforts with a renewed excitement. Learning about what others are doing in their communities, taking these different ideas, and applying it to a person's community goes a long way in supporting what everyone else is doing. By sharing with each other new ways to take on an issue, or shedding light on how to overcome some of the problems a person faces in their own community, participants are so much stronger in their work. People wrote that they were going to go home and start putting into action many of the ideas that were talked about over the weekend, like advocating for a smoke-free high school, working toward banning the sale of tobacco on campuses, and promoting the smoke-free lifestyle. People also talked about how they were now



better able to focus on the industry, and not the smoker. People can get defensive if you focus on them and not their addiction, so working on the industry is a great way to avoid alienating anyone. One person even said that they would think about quitting smoking because of this *Forum*.

*"We do this to make a difference. Every single person can make change happen, it just takes time for change to occur."*

– YAC member

It was interesting to note how many people talked about the importance of making their voice heard, and how many people wrote about the importance of getting young people out there and at the centre of the issue. This *Forum* was about getting young people involved. Right from the very start, youth and young adults were asked for their ideas and input on how to create this *Forum*. It made some of the people there just want to shout “Look what we can do!!” to everyone on the street. Some even said they wanted to write letters to their MLA and MP, and practice being a better advocate for themselves and their peers.



The point of having this *Forum* wasn't only so that people could learn about tobacco control and what's happening about it in this country. Though that was a large part of it, it wasn't the only reason young people were brought together. This event was also an opportunity for people to meet each other, form friendships and build networks with people from all over the country. Judging by how many email addresses were exchanged, and how disappointed a lot of people were that it was over, this was also a success. Now that they are back in their

own communities, these connections have become very important. It's always helpful to know what sort of activities are happening in other places across the country, as having this knowledge can help a person generate new ideas and give them the support they need for new initiatives. However they stay connected, knowing that others are out there working for the same goal can give someone the motivation they need to continue their work in the area of tobacco control. Not to mention that it's always nice to know more people and have more friends.

## CONCLUSION: KEEPING THE PASSION ALIVE

Being in one location for a weekend with over 140 people who all feel strongly about tobacco control reinforces that people are not isolated; they are not alone in their passion about creating healthier environments and healthier people. They are not alone in their desire for action on these tough issues. Seeing people from different backgrounds, cultures, ages and languages working hand in hand with each other helps a person see the reasons they are all involved in tobacco control.

Events like this *Forum* happen not to remind us that we have a long way to go, but to show us how far we have come and how much energy and willingness to tackle these tough issues there is in this country. So, keep using your knowledge and passion to take the action that is needed!

