

CAMPAIGN FOR JUSTICE ON TOBACCO FRAUD

CAMPAGNE POUR OBTENIR JUSTICE FACE À LA FRAUDE DU TABAC

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Health experts press provinces to put health measures on their tobacco fraud lawsuit agendas

Toronto, February 26, 2019/CNW/ – National and regional health groups, combined with deans and professors of medicine, health and law, published an open letter to provincial premiers today to press the provinces to put public health into their demands for outcomes from their lawsuits against Big Tobacco. “The provinces are suing the cigarette makers to recover the costs for the health care for sick and dying smokers,” said Garfield Mahood, president of the Campaign for Justice on Tobacco Fraud. “Their illnesses arose, allege the provinces, from industry conspiracy and fraud”.

The provinces allege that the manufacturers lied about tobacco risks, addiction, “light” and “mild” cigarettes and marketing to kids, illegal behaviour says *The Globe and Mail* ad. The ad’s headline quotes a Quebec judge who awarded smokers \$15 billion in the Blais/Letourneau class action lawsuit. He said the industry’s behaviour was “ruthless”, “immoral” and “beyond irresponsible”.

American states sued tobacco manufacturers to recover medicare costs arising out of the same wrongful behaviour that is alleged to have taken place in Canada, and recovered over US \$246 billion. However, the American settlements also produced major public health gains including landmark disclosure of previously secret tobacco industry documents, a public health treasure, and major funding for a public health foundation to fight the tobacco epidemic.

In contrast, the ad signatories fear that the provinces may only be interested in financial recovery, not in changed industry behaviour or other public health outcomes. “If all the provinces are interested in is a ‘cash grab’, it would have been more cost-effective to just raise tobacco taxes”, said Michael Perley, director of the Ontario Campaign for Action on Tobacco. “The provinces must include public health protection objectives in these lawsuits as well as cost recovery.”

“The signatories of the ad would like to know,” said Professor Jean Rochon, former Quebec Minister of Health and Social Services, “whether or not the provinces will make public health gains, either through court awards or negotiated settlements, a mandatory outcome of the fraud lawsuits. Forty-five thousand preventable tobacco deaths a year rooted in the alleged fraud cry out for attention in the courts or in settlement negotiations”, said Rochon.

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