

Speaking Notes – Kevin Coady, ACT
Tobacco Position Paper News Conference
November 8, 2012

Thank you Doctor Gabriel.

And be assured that I am very pleased to be here today representing The Alliance for the Control of Tobacco on such a very important health issue. ACT fully endorses the Newfoundland and Labrador Medical Association's recommendation that Government subsidize the cost of tobacco cessation medications for low-income residents under its Prescription Drug Program.

This is a health move that is long overdue.

In pre-budget consultations over the last number of years ACT has made the case that it was time for Government to revise its Prescription Drug Program to include tobacco cessation medications. In addition, ACT included this measure as a key action item in its 2009-2011 Tobacco Reduction Strategy and it is currently listed as a key action item in ACT's new Tobacco Reduction Strategy which will be released early in the new year. Unfortunately to date Government has not responded favorably to ACT's repeated call for this measure to be implemented.

ACT, like the Medical Association, believes that over the last number of years Government has taken the right steps in enacting legislation which made our restaurants, bars and workplaces smoke free and in enacting legislation which protects children from secondhand smoke in cars. These measures are a clear indication that Government recognizes the need to prevent people from starting to smoke and to protect individuals from the harms of secondhand smoke.

While such prevention and protection measures cannot be and SHOULD NEVER BE abandoned, ACT strongly believes that NOW MORE THEN EVER is the time for everyone, including and especially Government, to focus on cessation measures. Tobacco use places a staggering toll on our province's economy, on our health care system and above all on our people. In 2009, 725 people in our province died from a smoking related illness. That equates to an average of 14 people a week or 2 people each and every day. These numbers should be viewed as a cry for help. Those who use tobacco need help to beat the ADDICTION. Yes, it is an addiction and every possible step should be taken to offer help to the 87,000 people in our province who are fighting this addiction.

Where is a good place to begin offering this help? Well since we know smoking rates are generally higher amongst those who live in the lower income bracket then it makes full sense that offering help through the Provincial Drug Program is a good place to start. Hopefully a start here will encourage others to support Government efforts by rolling up their sleeves and working towards finding other ways to help everyone live a tobacco free life.

Should Government accept and act on this recommendation? YES - for all the reasons stated today.

Can Government afford to do this? YES - it is costing and will cost Government more not to do it.

When should Government do this? Immediately – each day people are dying from this addiction.

Thank you.