

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **NCACT applauds Government of Ontario commitment to tackle illicit tobacco industry, organized crime**

March 26, 2024 – The National Coalition Against Contraband Tobacco’s (NCACT) Executive Director Rick Barnum applauded the Government of Ontario’s budget commitment to crack down on the flourishing illicit trade of tobacco, which fuels violence and funds organized crime. Barnum is an over 30-year veteran of the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP), retiring as Deputy Commissioner overseeing organized crime.

“We are so pleased by today’s commitment from the Government of Ontario. The illicit trade of tobacco makes our communities more dangerous, funds organized crime, and takes money out of government coffers at the expense of taxpayers,” began Barnum. “I am thrilled that the government has recognized the enormous and growing challenge that it represents, and has committed to taking real action to tackle the problem.”

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) estimate there are over 175 organized crime groups are involved in the illicit trade.

Failing to tackle the rampant and growing illicit tobacco industry not only allows criminal activity to flourish, but it denies the provincial and federal governments much-needed tax revenue. For instance, a recent report by EY focusing on the cost of the illicit tobacco trade in Newfoundland, Ontario and British Columbia found that in Ontario alone that it costs the government “at least \$990 million [...] and possibly as high as \$1.7 billion.”

The Government of Ontario has committed to:

- Increasing police partnerships, training and education;
- Enhancing enforcement through new tobacco inspection partnerships, including empowering more than 200 *Smoke Free Ontario Act* inspectors to conduct plain view seizures of unmarked, contraband tobacco; and
- Increasing fines for the first time in 10 years to tackle the problem, including a new category that focuses on significant commercial quantities at places of business.

“We are delighted that the Government of Ontario is working to take action on this dangerous industry, and we are here to partner with them as they do so,” said Barnum. “These actions will ensure stronger enforcement and more deterrence, which will make our communities safer and cut some of the funding stream to organized gangs. We thank Minister Bethlenfalvy and Premier Ford for their recognition, and look forward to collaborating to ensure that this recognition turns into real action.”

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The National Coalition Against Contraband Tobacco is a Canadian advocacy group formed by organizations and associations concerned about the growing danger of contraband cigarettes. NCACT members share the goals of working together to educate people and urge government to take quick action to stop this growing threat. More information about the Coalition can be found on our website, [www.stopcontrabandtobacco.ca](http://www.stopcontrabandtobacco.ca).

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