

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

# Health Canada Pushing Smokers to the Illegal Market

June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023 (Ottawa, Ontario) – The National Coalition Against Contraband Tobacco (NCACT) responded today to the publication of regulations that will require health warnings on individual cigarettes, produced for the legal tobacco market.

“The government of Canada’s tobacco strategy will remain ineffective if illegal cigarettes continue to ignore all tobacco control measures,” stated Rick Barnum, Executive Director of the NCACT. “If Health Canada believes that these health warnings will reduce smoking rates, they cannot ignore the illegal market across Canada, which is estimated to be 30 percent of the total market”.

Despite warnings from the NCACT about the illegal market, the government introduced plain packaging regulations in 2019. As predicted, contraband cigarettes did not follow plain packaging rules, and continue to include colours, that according to Health Canada, attract smokers. Beyond the use of colourful packs, the illegal cigarettes continue to be sold without health warnings, in plain sight of consumers and easily accessible by youth

“We have warned the government on multiple occasions that it will be impossible for them to reach less than 5% tobacco use by 2035,” continued Barnum. “Without concerted effort against organized crime groups trafficking illegal cigarettes, any and all tobacco control measures will continue to be ignored and will continue to push smokers to the illegal market.”

Contraband tobacco accounts for over \$2 billion in lost tax revenue across Canada. In Ontario, the epicentre of contraband tobacco, the government estimates that it loses over \$750 million annually. Due to high revenue potential, the illicit trade is also growing exponentially in British Columbia and Alberta. The RCMP has reported over 175 organized crime groups involved in the lucrative trade. These criminal gangs use the proceeds of contraband tobacco to fund other illegal activities, including drugs, guns, and human trafficking.

“If the federal government wants to be serious about tobacco use in Canada, it needs to immediately address the growing contraband tobacco market. Not only do illegal cigarettes ignore all tobacco control measures enforced by the government, but they also directly fund criminal gang activity across the country. It’s time for the government to begin taking this issue seriously,” concluded Barnum.

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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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