

VIEW FROM QUEEN'S PARK: Protecting Our Youth

By Chris Ballard, MPP
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Protecting our children from future health issues is something we all have at heart.

I'm delighted to tell you that Bill 45 ? Making Healthier Choices Act is currently in third reading at the legislature and is expected to be passed this spring. I support this bill ? it touches on three important areas that will help keep our young people safe, including amendments to our government's Smoke-Free Ontario Act, restricting the sale of e-cigarettes, and legislating calorie labeling on menus.

The government is committed to keeping Ontarians healthy. We have pledged to reduce tobacco use to the lowest in the country. That's why the government moved ahead with this legislation that will strengthen our ability to reduce youth exposure to all tobacco products.

The Making Healthier Choices Act will ban all flavoured tobacco, including menthol.

A recent Ontario survey found more than 120,000 youth in grades 9 to 12 have used tobacco products in the past 30 days and, of those, more than 55,000 used flavoured tobacco products during that time.

Community support for the initiative is high. In early May I received postcards from students at Newmarket's Sacred Heart Catholic High School supporting the ban of all flavoured tobacco products in Ontario. I have also received letters of support from members of the community to ban these products.

The new legislation would also strengthen our Smoke-Free Ontario Act by increasing penalties for selling tobacco to kids, making them the highest penalties in Canada.

The government is also proposing changes to the Act to remove contraband tobacco from the underground market. Too many young people buy inexpensive contraband cigarettes from the trunks of distributors' cars. Too often these cigarettes are of questionable quality and contain material other than tobacco. In some cases, profits from the sale of contraband cigarettes goes to organized crime.

The use of e-cigarettes is a growing trend across Ontario. There are significant concerns about the possible health effects of e-cigarette use, especially on our young people, as well as implications for tobacco use prevention and cessation.

Although a number of people have related their stories about using e-cigarettes to end their nicotine addiction, there is limited formal research on the effectiveness of e-cigarettes in ending addiction. The Government of Ontario is funding research to learn more about e-cigarettes to enable us to make informed future decisions.

In a Statistics Canada national survey released in February 2015, 20 per cent ? or 417,000 youth between 15 to 19 years who responded ? said they had tried e-cigarettes.

It is not our government's intention to remove e-cigarettes from the Ontario marketplace at this time. The proposed approach focuses on taking action to protect Ontario's youth from accessing and using a product that may pose potential harm to their health.

Under our proposed legislation, retailers must request ID from anyone who appears to be under 25. They must also post signs explaining age-based sales restrictions. There would be a ban on the display and promotion of e-cigarettes in places where these products are sold. Owners or operators of entertainment facilities would not be able to employ or authorize anyone to promote e-cigarettes or the sale of e-cigarettes.

E-cigarette use would be prohibited where the smoking of tobacco is prohibited, and the sale of e-cigarettes would be prohibited where the sale of tobacco is prohibited.

The proposed menu labeling legislation is a key component of Ontario's Healthy Kids Strategy, which is focused on reducing childhood obesity. We know that healthy kids grow up to be healthier adults.

In order for parents and children to make healthy choices, they need to be informed about the restaurant food they are eating. The proposed legislation will make it easier for families to make informed and healthy food choices, and to give them the right information at the right place and time.

Chain restaurants with 20 or more Ontario locations will be brought under the Act. Owners and operators will be required to display the number of calories in each standard food item sold at the premises.

If the legislation passes, Ontario will be the first province in Canada to legislate menu labeling.

Not only will the new law raise public awareness about the calorie content of foods prepared in chain restaurants, it will make it easier for people to make healthier choices when dining out. I hope it will encourage the restaurant industry to offer healthier items

and to even reformulate high calorie menu items.

If you would like to contact me on any issue, please call my community office at 905-750-0019, or visit my website at www.chrisballard.ca. I look forward to hearing from you.