

alPHa's members are
the public health units
in Ontario.

alPHa Sections:

Boards of Health
Section

Council of Ontario
Medical Officers of
Health (COMOH)

Affiliate

Organizations:

ANDSOOHA - Public
Health Nursing
Management

Association of Ontario
Public Health Business
Administrators

Association of
Public Health
Epidemiologists
in Ontario

Association of
Supervisors of Public
Health Inspectors of
Ontario

Health Promotion
Ontario

Ontario Association of
Public Health Dentistry

Ontario Society of
Nutrition Professionals
in Public Health

16 July 2013

Hon. Deb Matthews,
Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
10th Flr, Hepburn Block
80 Grosvenor St
Toronto, ON M7A 2C4

Dear Minister Matthews,

Re: alPHa Resolution A13-5 - Provincial Legislation to Prohibit the Use of Waterpipes in Enclosed Public Places and Enclosed Workplaces

On behalf of member Medical Officers of Health, Boards of Health and Affiliate organizations of the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHa), I am writing today to introduce alPHa Resolution A13-5, Provincial Legislation to Prohibit the Use of Waterpipes in Enclosed Public Places and Enclosed Workplaces, which calls for a prohibition on the use of waterpipes (regardless of the substance being smoked) in all enclosed public places and enclosed workplaces.

Ontario has made a great deal of progress on the path toward a smoke-free Ontario in the last decade, but it is clear that there are still important steps to be taken. While the Smoke-Free Ontario Act (SFOA) is very clear about the prohibition on smoking tobacco in enclosed public places and workplaces, it does not contain any provisions to prevent the use of waterpipes in similar situations.

Although waterpipes (also commonly known as hookahs or shishas) are promoted as a vehicle for smoking substances other than tobacco, the fact that the SFOA does not apply to them means that smoking in enclosed public spaces continues to be a pressing public health issue.

The proliferation of dedicated "shisha" bars following the enactment of the SFOA has created new challenges for our members, especially as they provide opportunity to circumvent the SFOA provisions by adding tobacco to the "herbal preparations". We have no practical way of verifying that the shisha preparations are in fact tobacco-free, and therefore cannot properly enforce the SFOA if it does in fact apply.

Even without tobacco in the mix, permitting this type of smoking indoors undermines our progress toward a truly smoke-free Ontario. It gives the false impression that smoking in enclosed spaces remains acceptable, and it ignores the growing body of evidence that smoking these herbal preparations via this delivery method has very serious health impacts.

We hope that you will carefully consider strengthening the Smoke Free Ontario Act to ban smoking of any kind in all locations to which it currently applies, thereby further contributing to improving the health of all Ontarians.

Yours truly,

ORIGINAL SIGNED

Mary Johnson
President

Copy: Dr. Arlene King, Chief Medical Officer of Health; Kate Manson-Smith, Assistant Deputy Minister of Health and Long-Term Care (Health Promotion Division)

TITLE: Provincial Legislation to Prohibit the Use of Waterpipes in Enclosed Public Places and Enclosed Workplaces

SPONSOR: Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit

WHEREAS the emerging use of waterpipes in enclosed public places and enclosed workplaces has the potential to undermine the success of the Smoke-Free Ontario Act; and

WHEREAS tobacco-free (“herbal”) waterpipe smoke has been demonstrated to have concentrations of toxins comparable to tobacco waterpipe smoke¹; and

WHEREAS the environmental smoke from waterpipe use in indoor public places and workplaces has been demonstrated to contain toxins at harmful concentrations²; and

WHEREAS the alleged “herbal” preparations are poorly regulated and often contain tobacco even when they are labelled tobacco free³; and

WHEREAS the Tobacco Strategy Advisory Group report recommends an amendment of the Smoke-Free Ontario Act, with “the addition of controls on the indoor use of waterpipes such as hookahs”;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHa) advocate for provincial legislation to be enacted to prohibit the use of waterpipes (regardless of the substance being smoked) in all enclosed public places and enclosed workplaces.

ACTION FROM CONFERENCE: Resolution CARRIED

References

¹ Shidadeh A; Salman R; Jaroud E; Saliba N; Sepetdijian E; Blank M; Does switching to a tobacco-free waterpipe reduce toxicant intake? A crossover study comparing CO, NO, PAH, volatile aldehydes, tar and nicotine yields. Food and Chemical Toxicology Journal Vol. 50, Issue 5, 2012.

² The Ontario Tobacco Research Unit, OTRU Update, Waterpipe Smoking: A Growing Health Concern, January 31, 2011.

³ The Non-Smokers’ Rights Association, Hooked on Hookah: Issue Analysis and Policy Options for Waterpipe Smoking in Ontario, March 2011.