

Green Party of Canada Response to The Lung Association

1) Will you support funding The National Lung Health Framework, Canada's first national action plan on lung health?

This past August, the Canadian Medical Association released a report which showed that as many as 21,000 Canadians will die prematurely this year from the effects of air pollution. The report also found that by 2031, a staggering 90,000 Canadians will have died from the acute short-term effects of air pollution. These staggering findings underlie both the need for action on the environment and climate change to curb air-related illnesses as well as a preventative and proactive national plan for health care as well.

Much needless suffering, premature loss of life, and considerable healthcare costs can be avoided through the implementation of improved health research, screening programs, more timely diagnosis, earlier treatment, improved lifestyles, and healthier public policies and environments. For example, it is estimated that as many as 50 percent of lung cancers may be preventable through improved education, early treatment, smoking cessation, and environmental regulation. Yet traditionally, funding allocated for health promotion has fluctuated in the vicinity of 1 percent of overall health system funding, despite the demonstrated cost-effectiveness of many disease prevention and health promotion programs.

The Green Party recognizes the integral link between the environment and the health of Canadians in its comprehension that many diseases and illnesses, including those that target the lungs can be prevented through strong environmental measures.

The Green Party is committed to working with provincial stakeholders to better compensate family physicians and other health professionals for health education and health promotion services work with key stakeholders such as the Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance of Canada (CDPAC), the Canadian Lung Association, the Heart and Stroke Foundation, and others to promote integrated, innovative, evidence-based, inter-sectoral and comprehensive approaches to disease prevention and health promotion.

The Canadian Lung Association's pioneering work with the National Lung Health Framework is the very sort of made in Canada solution that a Green government would commit to integrate within a comprehensive national Health promotion strategy.

2) Will you back strong legislation and regulation to clean up the air Canadians breathe?

The Green Party knows that regulating to reduce the precursors of smog (particulates, sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxide) as well as to reduce serious neuro-toxic contamination of air with mercury is necessary and is immediately possible within the Canadian Environmental Protection Act (CEPA). Regulating to reduce these contaminants must be coupled with reducing the burning of fossil fuels that emits particulates as well as climate-warming greenhouse gases (GHGs). Measures to meet Kyoto targets by reducing reliance on fossil fuels will have important benefits in avoiding ever worsening heat impacts and these contaminants.

The link between the pollution in the air we breathe and the illnesses many Canadians develop is clear. Recent governments have claimed to want to reduce pollution and greenhouse gas emissions but place very little monetary value on keeping the air we breathe and water we drink clean. The Green Party is passionately committed to comprehensive and effective legislation that will take action to clean up the air we breathe. This would include strengthening CEPA with specific and strong regulations to reduce particulates, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxide, mercury and other airborne contaminants and addressing smog-causing heat and pollution through solutions outlined in the climate change/Kyoto sections of our Vision Green policy document.

3) Will you support increased funding for research on lung disease?

The Green Party is committed to increasing funding for community-based health research. It has been shown that much needless suffering; premature loss of life, and considerable healthcare costs can be avoided through improved health research. For example, research has increasingly shown that social and environmental factors, such as the way our communities are designed, and regulatory environments have an impact on healthy eating behaviours and physical activity. Canada was an early pioneer in the international healthy communities movement, with a strong federal presence in research and program funding. The Green Party plans to renew this critical leadership.

Research methodologies that include perspectives of all citizens will allow for a more meaningful representation of the health problems of greatest concern to Canadians. This includes research into health promotion and prevention, which can provide key solutions to the alarming rise in respiratory ailments. Existing federal health funding bodies (the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, for example) would be encouraged to do more on this front.