



**B R E A T H E**  
the lung association

**Written Submission for the Federal Government  
Ahead of the 2023 Budget**

**The Canadian Lung Association**

February 10, 2023

**B R E A T H E**  
the lung association

**R E S P I R E Z**  
l'association pulmonaire

# About The Canadian Lung Association

The Canadian Lung Association is the leading organization in Canada helping Canadians breathe. We work to save lives, prevent lung disease and improve lung health through research, advocacy, education and support. As a non-profit and volunteer-based health charity, we depend on donations from the public to support our mission to lead nationwide and international lung health initiatives, prevent lung disease, help people manage lung disease and promote lung health.

[www.lung.ca](http://www.lung.ca)

## Recommendations:

1. **Recommendation 1:** Establish a National Long-COVID strategy which includes funding for research, a national registry, and support for interdisciplinary rehabilitation clinics.
2. **Recommendation 2:** Make strong commitments to combat the Climate Crisis to minimize the impact of increasing air quality issues on the health of Canadians by:
  - **Recommendation 2.1:** *Implementing a plan to accelerate the electrification of school buses in Canada by 2040.*
  - **Recommendation 2.2:** *including radon mitigation in Energy Efficiency Rebate Programs.*
3. **Recommendation 3:** Implement strong measures to prevent a new generation from nicotine addiction through:
  - **Recommendation 3.1:** *Implement a cost recovery fee on the tobacco industry.*
  - **Recommendation 3.2:** *Continue to increase tobacco taxes.*
4. **Recommendation 4:** Fulfill the mandate to implement national pharmacare.

## Recommendation 1: Establish a National Long-COVID strategy which includes funding for research, a national registry, and support for interdisciplinary rehabilitation clinics.

---

To date Canada has had over 4.5 million COVID-19 cases.<sup>1</sup> It is estimated that 10-40% of individuals may develop longer lasting, in some cases debilitating symptoms. Canada is behind in terms of research and support to manage symptoms of long-COVID.<sup>2</sup>

Most people who develop Covid-19 resume a normal life about two weeks after their illness<sup>2</sup>. However some individuals experience long-term symptoms including cognitive issues, such as brain fog, headaches, fatigue, dizziness, anxiety, and/or persistent respiratory symptoms.<sup>2</sup>

Most common long lasting respiratory symptoms include shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, and cough.<sup>3-5</sup> These symptoms are not simply minor inconveniences. Many people experiencing long covid describe them as ‘crushing’; ‘overwhelming’ ‘unmanageable’ and ‘unpredictable’.

We were pleased to see the announcement of an investment in long-covid research within the 2022 Federal Budget of \$20 million over 5 years.<sup>6</sup> This is a good start but more is needed and patients suffering with post-covid symptoms need support now. As a result, we would like to see a National long COVID strategy, including substantial investments in research, a national long COVID registry, and support for interdisciplinary rehabilitation clinics across the country.

National registries have been used in the past to report on national statistics, aid in targeted research on the issue and provide a comprehensive picture of that disease state for the country. In Canada, for example we currently have a National Dose Registry, Joint Replacement Registry, Cystic Fibrosis Registry, amongst others. There are additional examples at the provincial level and internationally.<sup>7-9</sup> Other countries also see the need for a National Registry on long-covid and are making similar recommendations in their approach to address the COVID-19 pandemic in the long-term.<sup>10</sup> Examples of local registries can be found in the US, UK, and here in Canada but a National approach is required to ensure that no Canadian experiencing long-covid symptoms is left behind.

## **Recommendation 2: Make strong commitments to combat the Climate Crisis to minimize the impact of increasing air quality issues on the health of Canadians**

---

Canadians are already facing the health and financial burden of the climate crisis through extreme weather, exacerbated lung conditions, and worsened quality of air. In fact, thousands of hospital visits and more than 15,000 premature deaths each year in Canada are attributable to air pollution.<sup>11</sup>

### *Recommendation 2.1: Implementing a plan to accelerate the electrification of school buses in Canada by 2040.*

The transportation sector is a leading source of harmful air pollution in Canada and worldwide, accounting for 25% of our greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>11,12</sup> Of particular concern from a lung health perspective is diesel exhaust, which is classified as a human carcinogen.<sup>11,12</sup>

The short term and long term respiratory impacts of exposure to diesel are significant, ranging from reduced lung capacity, increased inflammation and risks of asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.<sup>12,13</sup>

Diesel emissions alone are estimated to cause 2,200,000 acute respiratory symptom days, 170,000 asthma symptoms days, and 3,000 acute child bronchitis episodes annually in Canada.<sup>12,13</sup>

Over two million children in Canada ride school buses, 70% of which are fueled by diesel.<sup>12</sup> The Canadian Lung Association is one of many organizations, part of the Canadian Electric School Bus Alliance (CESBA) calling on the electrification of school buses by 2040.

Improvements in battery cost and performance over the last decade have significantly increased the range capabilities of Electric School Buses (ESBs). New ESBs in the market have ranges of approximately 160 km, covering the daily travel requirements of most school buses.<sup>13</sup>

In 2021, the Government of Canada launched the Zero Emission Transit Fund, investing \$2.75 billion to support public transit and school bus operators to transition to zero emission vehicles, from planning to purchasing vehicles and building infrastructure.<sup>14</sup>

Additionally commitments have been made to support transit agencies and school boards in transitioning their bus fleets to zero-emission technology through the planning and the purchasing of at least 5,000 zero-emission buses along with the necessary supporting infrastructure.<sup>13</sup>

Additional funding is required to accelerate implementation, including awareness raising and education efforts on the important benefits to children's health of transitioning our school bus fleets.

### *Recommendation 2.2: Include radon mitigation in Energy Efficiency Rebate Programs*

Budget 2021 announced an investment of \$4.4 billion in home energy retrofits for Canadians and Budget 2022 committed more funds to Greener Buildings and Homes Programs.<sup>6,15</sup> These programs are significant to help Canadians save money and reduce their greenhouse gas contribution. However, as Canadians tighten their homes and increase the energy efficiency, they may be exposing themselves to increased levels of radon gas.

Radon gas is the second leading cause of lung cancer. However, when high concentrations are detected through testing; mitigation systems can be installed. Many Canadians however are unaware of radon and the health hazards it may pose.<sup>16</sup> They may also be reluctant to test to avoid the costs associated with mitigation.<sup>16</sup> Inclusion of radon mitigation within the energy efficiency rebate program would address the unintended impacts of tightening our homes and ensure the quality of our inside air is improved.

### **Recommendation 3: Implement strong measures to prevent a new generation from nicotine addiction**

---

Tobacco continues to be the number one cause of preventable disease and death in Canada killing over 48,000 annually.<sup>17</sup> While Canada's smoking rate is going down, still far too many people continue to smoke. The 2018 announcement of a new Federal Tobacco Strategy with the goal of less than 5% smoking rate by 2035, brought forward an ambitious public health goal in Canada for which strong measures are required.<sup>17</sup>

### *Recommendation 3.1: Implement a cost recovery fee on the tobacco industry*

Health Canada committed \$330 million over five years, or \$66 million annually to the federal tobacco control strategy to help Canadians quit and protect the health of young people and non-smokers.<sup>17</sup>

Industry accountability must be front and centre to a federal tobacco strategy. This includes implementing mechanisms for the industry to make a direct contribution toward the costs of tobacco control and public health activities, of which they are the cause.

We were pleased to see a tobacco manufacturer cost recovery fee included in the Liberal, Conservative and NDP 2021 election platforms, and reinforced in the mandate letter to Associate Minister of Health Dr. Carolyn Bennett. We urge the government to move quickly to adopt this measure to at least recover the costs of the strategy for programs to prevent Canadian's from starting and support those who do smoke, to quit.

### *Recommendation 3.2: Continue to raise tobacco taxes*

Tobacco taxes are one of the most effective policy levers for preventing tobacco use, particularly amongst young people. The Canadian Lung Association alongside other health organizations have called for an increase of \$6 per carton, which would result in approximately \$593 million in federal tobacco tax per year. This is a significant additional amount of funding that could be allocated to government priorities while at the same time serving important public health measures.

It should be noted that counter arguments that taxes increase contraband or unfairly raise prices should not be considered as legitimate reasons to not raise taxes. At the same time, the tobacco industry continues to raise their own prices resulting in an estimate of more than \$2.6 billion in revenue annually.

Tobacco taxes are one of the most important preventative tools at our disposal and should be included in any comprehensive strategy to reduce tobacco use.

## Recommendation 4: Fulfill the mandate to implement national pharmacare.

---

The numbers speak for themselves. One in five Canadians report having difficulty paying for prescription medications because they have no coverage and one in ten Canadians have difficulty paying for prescription medications even when they have health benefits coverage.<sup>18</sup> Ability to pay for prescription medicines within asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) populations has been shown to have a non-adherence rate of 10%. This is concerning considering that COPD is the number one cause of hospitalization in Canada outside of childbirth and asthma is one of the top hospitalization causes for children.<sup>19</sup>

A responsive, progressive national pharmacare program should enhance access for Canadians living with respiratory diseases, including life-saving therapies for people living with cystic fibrosis and lung cancer as well as those living with chronic diseases such as asthma and COPD.

In the federal government's Budget 2019, the first steps were put in place in moving toward national pharmacare but more needs to be done to ensure affordable medicine is accessible for all Canadians.<sup>18</sup> The government should fulfill their mandate to build a national pharmacare program.

## References:

---

1. Government of Canada. 2022. COVID Epidemiological Update. Accessed at: <https://health-infobase.canada.ca/covid-19/>
2. Government of Canada. Accessed at: Post-COVID 19 Condition. Accessed at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/symptoms/post-covid-19-condition.html>
3. David HE et al. 2020. Characterizing long COVID in an international cohort: 7 months of symptoms and their impact. <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.12.24.20248802v2.full.pdf>
4. Greenhalgh T, Knight M, Court C, Buxton M, Husain L. Management of post-acute covid-19 in primary care *BMJ* 2020; <https://www.bmj.com/content/370/bmj.m3026>.
5. Logue JK, Franko NM, McCulloch DJ, et al. Sequelae in Adults at 6 Months After COVID-19 Infection. *JAMA Netw Open.* 2021;4(2):e210830. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2021.0830
6. Federal Budget 2022: A plan to grow our economy. Accessed at: <https://budget.gc.ca/2022/report-rapport/toc-tdm-en.html>
7. National Dose Registry. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/health-risks-safety/radiation/national-dose-registry.html>
8. Canadian Joint Replacement Registry. <https://www.cihi.ca/en/canadian-joint-replacement-registry-cjrr>
9. Cystic Fibrosis Registry. <https://www.cysticfibrosis.ca/registry/2020AnnualDataReport.pdf>
10. Recommendations for a voluntary Long COVID registry (DOI: 10.1177/01410768221114964) by Fern Davies, Baroness Illora Finlay, Helen Howson and Nicholas Rich will be published by the Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine at 00:05 hrs (UK time) on Wednesday 27 July 2022.
11. Government of Canada. 2020. Health impacts from air pollution. <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/campaigns/canadian-environment-week/clean-air-day/health-impacts-air-pollution.html>
12. American Lung Association. 2020. Road to clean air report. <https://www.lung.org/getmedia/99cc945c-47f2-4ba9-ba59-14c31uca332a/electric-vehicle-report.pdf>
13. Pollution Probe. 2022. Opportunities for accelerating school bus electrification in Ontario. Accessed at: <https://www.pollutionprobe.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/White-Paper-Opportunities-for-accelerating-school-bus-electrification-in-Ontario.pdf>



14. Government of Canada. 2022. Zero-emission Transit Fund. Accessed at:  
<https://www.infrastructure.gc.ca/zero-emissions-trans-zero-emissions/index-eng.html>
15. Government of Canada. Budget 2021. A recovery plan for jobs, growth, and resilience.  
<https://www.budget.gc.ca/2021/home-accueil-en.html>
16. Environics Research. 2018. 2018 National Radon Awareness Survey: report created for Health Canada.
17. Government of Canada. 2022. Canada's Tobacco Strategy. Accessed at:  
<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/publications/healthy-living/canada-tobacco-strategy.html>
18. Government of Canada. 2019. A prescription for Canada: achieving pharmacare for all.  
<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/corporate/about-health-canada/public-engagement/external-advisory-bodies/implementation-national-pharmacare/final-report.html>
19. Canadian Institutes for Health Information. 2019.  
<https://www.cihi.ca/en/giving-birth-lung-and-heart-problems-among-top-reasons-for-hospitalization>