

# Policy Updates: Smoke and Vape-Free Environments Policy

## June 18, 2024

The major policy updates since the 2017 version of the Tobacco and Smoke-Free Environments policy include:

- A title change from Tobacco and Smoke-Free Environments Policy to Smoke and Vape-Free Environments Policy.
- Replacing the "tobacco-like products" definition with "vaping"
- The removal of Special Considerations.
- The addition of the exemption for spiritual and ceremonial Indigenous practices.

### **Title Change from Tobacco and Smoke-Free Environments Policy to Smoke and Vape-Free Environments Policy**

This language change was made to reflect the updates in the *Alberta Tobacco, Smoking and Vaping Reduction Act* (TSVRA). In July 2021, the TSVRA was amended to prohibit smoking and vaping on all hospital properties including the building, grounds and parking areas.

### **Replacing "Tobacco-like Products" with "Vaping"**

The previous definition of "tobacco-like products" has been removed and replaced with a definition for "vaping" to align further with the TSVRA. Vaping means to inhale or exhale the vapour produced by a device that contains a power source and heating element intended for vaporizing a substance. Vaping substances may or may not include nicotine or cannabis. Vaping does not include any regulated Nicotine Replacement Therapy product.

### **Removal of Special Considerations**

Previously, the Tobacco and Smoke-Free Environments Policy included a process to apply for a Special Consideration, which was an approval for an individual to be able to smoke or use tobacco on the property in special circumstances. In the TSVRA there are no exemptions for individuals to smoke or vape on any hospital properties. Therefore, to be totally compliant with provincial legislation AHS has removed the option for Special Considerations. AHS is committed to providing patients, families, visitors and AHS staff with a safe and healthy environment, including one that is free of smoke or vape from tobacco, cannabis and other smoked/vaped products.

### **Exemption for Spiritual and Ceremonial Indigenous Practices**

The right to traditional and ceremonial tobacco use is also acknowledged in the TSVRA. AHS supports all clients and families' requests for Indigenous spiritual ceremonies on AHS property, including smudging and pipe ceremonies that involve burning substances (traditional medicines). Indigenous spiritual ceremonies are strong cultural practices that support health and wellbeing and can play an important role in a patient's healing journey in a healthcare setting. Indigenous spiritual ceremonies that involve burning substances, such as smudging and pipe ceremonies, are exceptions to existing AHS policies and guidelines around open flame and smoke inside an AHS site.

## Compliance

- Enforcement of this Policy is a joint responsibility of AHS Leadership, Protective Services, and all other AHS staff.
- The TSVRA states that site managers are responsible for ensuring that active enforcement of this policy is taking place on their respective grounds. Managers who permit smoking where it is prohibited are liable for fines ranging from up to \$10,000 for a first offence and up to \$100,000 for a second or subsequent offence.
- Any person found smoking or vaping on AHS property shall be notified of AHS' commitment to a smoke and vape-free environment.
- Any person who continues to smoke or vape on AHS property after verbal notification may be subject to penalty including, but not limited to:
  - fines or citations issued under the *Tobacco, Smoking and Vaping Reduction Act* (Alberta) and applicable municipal bylaws, when the consumption is in violation with their established limits;
  - citations under the *Trespass to Premises Act* (Alberta); and/or
  - disciplinary action in accordance with AHS' *Progressive Discipline* Procedure and applicable collective agreements.

## Statement of Principles

**Promoting the well-being of patients, families, AHS staff, and the public** Tobacco consumption is the leading preventable cause of death, disease, disability and premature death in Alberta. Smoking and vaping is also a threat to the health and well-being of Albertans. Enhancing the overall health and wellness, as well as limiting the suffering, of individual patients, families, visitors and AHS staff are important goals of the healthcare system. The AHS value of Safety includes the active promotion of safety and wellness for our communities and patients, and workplace safety and wellness for AHS staff. To do this, AHS needs to ensure all AHS properties are the healthiest environments they can be.

### Avoiding Harm

It is the job of AHS to protect people's health. Environments that are not completely smoke and vapour-free expose patients, families, visitors and AHS staff to second and third-hand smoke or other harmful by-products, both of which are harmful to health. Exposure to others smoking or vaping can be potentially harmful to a patient's recovery and to those who work in areas of exposure. Smoking and vaping also poses environmental harms to AHS property. Patients, families, AHS staff, and the public should not be exposed to harm where it is reasonably avoidable.

### **Respecting autonomy & promoting patient-centered care**

Tobacco consumption and nicotine addiction are complex health issues. It can be hard to go without a cigarette or vape, particularly during stressful times when an individual or loved one may be in need of care. Individuals are responsible for making choices about their own health, including whether they wish to stop using tobacco or vape products. As AHS engages patients and families as full partners in their own care, individuals should be provided the opportunity to make choices about their own health and offered appropriate health information to be able to make such choices. To best support patients who consume tobacco or vape products while in care, appropriate NRT and medications are available, as are resources about the health risks of using tobacco. Patients choosing to quit tobacco consumption will be supported in doing so through the provision of appropriate NRT and medication (as medically appropriate), and referrals to AlbertaQuits cessation services.

### **Promoting fairness**

Individuals should not be unfairly burdened with the consequences of circumstances over which they have little control. Smoke and vape-free environments help protect those patients, visitors and AHS staff who do not wish to expose themselves to smoke or other by-products, who have quit, or are trying to quit as seeing people smoking or vaping can be harmful to those recovering.