

MEDIA RELEASE

May 29, 2025

For immediate release

On World No Tobacco Day, Alberta Blue Cross®, Alberta Lung and Keep Tobacco Sacred rally Albertans against youth tobacco use and vaping

In recognition of World No Tobacco Day on May 31, Alberta Blue Cross, Alberta Lung and Keep Tobacco Sacred are drawing attention to the rising threat of youth tobacco use and vaping and the urgent need for community-based education and culturally respectful prevention resources.

As a proud sponsor of Alberta Lung's *Breathe Smart! Education Program*, Alberta Blue Cross supports lung-health educational workshops in schools across the province—empowering students with facts about the health impacts of e-cigarettes and the tactics used by the vaping industry to attract youth.

"*Breathe Smart!* is one of our most visible and in demand initiatives—over 30,000 people have been educated and empowered," says Jamie Happy, program manager and health promotion coordinator with Alberta Lung. "Furthermore, the program is collaborating with the federal CLOUD vaping study in 2025 to empower youth on their own health."

[Alberta Health Services reports](#) that tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death in Alberta, and more than 4,000 Albertans die from tobacco use each year.

Beyond statistics, education matters. Through its partnership with *Keep Tobacco Sacred*, Alberta Blue Cross also champions Indigenous-led approaches to tobacco education. *Keep Tobacco Sacred* is an initiative to reduce tobacco use among Alberta First Nations communities. This is done by engaging First Nations elders, knowledge keepers and youth to develop and implement local initiatives to prevent and reduce commercial tobacco use and support the restoration of cultural knowledge regarding sacred and traditional tobacco.

"Tobacco sold in stores is not the same as the tobacco that our people used. As a Blackfoot individual, tobacco is very important to me; I believe in keeping the sacredness in the 'Tobacco'. This helps bring us closer to our culture and people," says Ethan Yellow Old Woman, a member of the Siksika Nation who serves as a Tobacco Warrior with the Keep Tobacco Sacred Collaboration.

"Together, we're committed to continued action around reducing commercial tobacco use and vaping while recognizing and respecting Indigenous tradition," says Brian Geislinger, senior vice-president of Corporate Relations and Community Engagement at Alberta Blue Cross.

As a champion for wellness for Albertans, Alberta Blue Cross is a long-standing advocate for tobacco reduction. The organization is a member of the Campaign for a Smoke-Free Alberta, is a founding sponsor of the Keep Tobacco Sacred Collaboration, administers the AlbertaQuits program on behalf of Alberta Health Services and provide supports for tobacco cessation through many of its benefit plan offerings.

Did you know?

- [The Canadian Substance Use Survey](#), released in December 2024, shows that nearly a third (31 per cent) of Canadian teenagers (aged 15 to 19 years) used a vaping product in the last 30 days, higher than any other previous estimate. The study shows that while Albertan youth still exceed

the national average (since 2019) in trying e-cigarettes and continued use, it has decreased a few percentage points since 2022.

- [The Canadian Cancer Society](#) states that the aerosol from an e-cigarette contains many chemicals, including cancer-causing substances. Limited evidence from human and animal studies suggests that e-cigarettes can cause genetic changes and DNA damage, potentially increasing cancer risk.
- [According to Health Canada](#), kids and teens are especially susceptible to the harmful effects of nicotine because brain development continues throughout adolescence and into early adulthood.
- [Keep Tobacco Sacred states](#) that in Indigenous communities, children start smoking, vaping and using spit tobacco much younger than in other communities. In some cases, children as young as 7 or 8 are starting to use commercial tobacco. Recent studies have shown that vaping is also higher among Indigenous youth.

Where to get support:

- [Alberta Lung Breathe Smart Education Program](#): delivers lung-health workshops at schools across Alberta—focused on e-cigarettes and vaping as a growing and concerning trend among youth lung.
- [Keep Tobacco Sacred](#): supports Indigenous youth in learning about the cultural significance of the traditional ceremonial use of sacred tobacco while decreasing the use of commercial tobacco among Indigenous youth.
- [Alberta Quits](#): provides resources for quitting vaping and smoking.

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About [Alberta Blue Cross](#)

As the largest provider of health benefits in Alberta, we believe we have the potential and responsibility to impact people's lives for the better. We believe all communities should thrive, and we are committed to serving as a champion for wellness by promoting the health of Albertans.

About [Alberta Lung](#)

Alberta Lung believes that saving lungs saves lives, especially for the 1 in 5 Albertans and their families affected by lung disease. Since 1939, Alberta Lung has championed lung health in Alberta by supporting patients, research, advocacy and education.

About [Keep Tobacco Sacred Collaboration](#)

Keep Tobacco Sacred is comprised of business leaders across the province whose mission is to support cultural connectedness and healing through Sacred Tobacco, to improve health outcomes in Indigenous communities.

For more information, please contact Jaclyn Spurrell, manager of Corporate Communications, Alberta Blue Cross at jspurrel@ab.bluecross.ca or 780-498-8255 or Alberta Lung at 780-488-6819 or info@ablung.ca.