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## **Political factors and tobacco knowledge predict legislators' support for tobacco control policies**

Studies carried out by the Ontario Tobacco Research Unit have identified key factors that may help predict whether legislators will support tobacco policies. Furthermore, these findings appear generalizable to other public health issues.

Specifically, legislators are more likely to support tobacco control policies if they:

- believe that government has a duty to promote healthy lifestyles
- are New Democrats
- place their political views toward the left on a left-right scale
- are aware that tobacco causes more deaths than alcohol, and that second-hand smoke can cause lung cancer
- have no tobacco industry jobs in their ridings
- want more contact with medical associations about tobacco-related issues

They are less likely to support tobacco control policies if they:

- are Progressive Conservatives
- smoke cigarettes

Similarly, legislators are more likely to support public health policies if they:

- believe that government has a duty to promote healthy lifestyles
- are not Progressive Conservatives or members of the Reform Party
- place their political views toward the left on a left-right scale

In both cases, personal characteristics are not related to support.

These findings were obtained from the Canadian Legislator Study, a project funded by the National Health Research and Development Program of Canada. Structured, computer-assisted telephone interviews were conducted with 553 Canadian federal, provincial and territorial legislators between July 1996 and June 1997. The response rate was at least 60% in 10 of the 13 jurisdictions.

The results imply that political ideology and party membership can predict legislators' support for tobacco control policies and other public health measures. Legislators who oppose tobacco control and other public health policies may not oppose those policies per se, but rather may be opposed more generally to an interventionist role for government. Public health professionals and tobacco control advocates need to be more attentive to political ideology and party membership when enlisting legislator support for healthy public policy. Non-governmental organizations and other health advocates could work to increase tobacco knowledge among legislators.

The project team consists of [Joanna Cohen](#),<sup>1,2</sup> [Mary Jane Ashley](#),<sup>1,2</sup> [Roberta Ferrence](#),<sup>1,2,3</sup> David Northrup,<sup>4</sup> Donley Studlar<sup>5</sup> and Nicole de Guia.

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<sup>1</sup> Ontario Tobacco Research Unit, University of Toronto, Ontario, Canada

<sup>2</sup> Department of Public Health Sciences, University of Toronto, Ontario, Canada

<sup>3</sup> Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

<sup>4</sup> Institute for Social Research, York University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

<sup>5</sup> Department of Political Science, West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia, USA