

November 3, 2020

Dear members of the APHA Board of Directors,

In light of the recent publication in the American Journal of Public Health, the official journal of the American Public Health Association (APHA), of material provided by a tobacco industry front organization, we are writing to ask for the APHA's support and leadership on a critical public health issue.

The World Health Organization (WHO) states that the tobacco epidemic is one of the biggest public health threats the world has ever faced, killing more than 8 million people a year around the world (1). Those targeted and harmed by the tobacco industry are overwhelmingly disadvantaged populations whose lives are frequently devalued (2).

In light of the tobacco industry's long, thoroughly documented and continuing practice of undermining public health protections relating to its commercial products (2,3,4,5,6,7), countries around the world adopted the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) in 2003 (8). The Convention requires that the 181 countries who have ratified the Convention **not** engage or collaborate with the tobacco industry or organizations funded by the tobacco industry.

The United States is one of the few countries who have not ratified the Convention. This makes it all the more important that public health organizations such as the APHA demonstrate leadership to support the Convention.

The WHO has specifically called on public health organizations not to engage or collaborate with the tobacco industry or organizations funded by the tobacco industry (9).

Ethics require that the tobacco industry be held accountable for its continuing malfeasance in undermining effective public health measures to stop tobacco use, thus causing millions of preventable deaths. The APHA, it seems to us, has a responsibility not to turn a blind eye to this wrong-doing, thus helping to legitimize it.

We ask that the APHA board hold a transparent discussion of this critical public health issue and we ask that the APHA adopt a policy to support the WHO request that public health organizations not collaborate with the tobacco industry or tobacco industry front groups.

We look forward to receiving your response.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Ruff, Recipient, Canadian Public Health Association National Public Health Hero Award; Honorary Fellow, Collegium Ramazzini

Philip J. Landrigan, Director, Program for Global Public Health and the Common Good,  
Schiller Institute for Integrated Science and Society, Boston College

Richard A. Lemen, Retired Assistant Surgeon General, United States Public Health Service;  
Adjunct Professor, Rollins School of Public Health, Emory University, Atlanta, GA.

## **BACKGROUND NOTES**

- The WHO states that any collaboration with the tobacco industry or organizations funded by the tobacco industry would constitute a clear breach of Article 5.3 of the Convention.
- Leading public health organizations, such as the Global Coalition for Circulatory Health, the World Federation of Public Health Associations, the World Heart Federation (10), have condemned tobacco industry front organizations, such as the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World which is funded with almost \$1 billion over the next ten years by Phillip Morris International, as an attempt by the tobacco industry to subvert public policy for a tobacco-free world and have urged all parties with an interest in public health to do the same.
- The American Cancer Society states (11): "This attempt ((the creation of the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World) by Philip Morris International to paint itself as a public health partner is manipulative and dangerous. It is a new twist out of the tobacco industry's deadly playbook, but nobody should be fooled. It's a continuation of a decades-long effort to paint over tobacco's role in spreading death and misery around the globe. American Cancer Society policy prohibits partnering with any research or public health effort that takes tobacco industry support. It is unethical to take money earned off the top cause of preventable deaths in the world."
- Deans of Schools of Public Health have stated (12) that they will not accept funding from or pursue work with the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World, noting that "both the tobacco industry and Philip Morris International have a long history of funding "research" in ways meant to purposely confuse the public and advance their own interests, aggressively market cigarettes globally, including to children, and persist in their relentless opposition to evidence-based tobacco control interventions."

## **REFERENCES**

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- 6) The Lancet, Condemning industry attempts to subvert public policy for a tobacco-free world, [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(17\)32604-1/fulltex](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(17)32604-1/fulltex),  
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- 7) Letter from major public health organizations around the world asking UN Secretary-General to call out tobacco industry deadly manipulations and misinformation, May 5, 2020, <https://www.world-heart-federation.org/news/wtf-un-fight-tobacco-industry-misinformation-pandemic/>
- 8) WHO Statement on Philip Morris funded Foundation for a Smoke-Free World, 28 September 2017, <https://www.who.int/en/news-room/detail/28-09-2017-who-statement-on-philip-morris-funded-foundation-for-a-smoke-free-world>
- 9) The Lancet, Statement by the Global Coalition for Circulatory Health and the World Federation of Public Health Associations, October 14, 2017, Condemning industry attempts to subvert public policy for a tobacco-free world,  
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- 10) Statement by American Cancer Society, <http://pressroom.cancer.org/releases?item=720>
- 11) Statement by Deans of Schools of Public Health, <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/deans-office/2018/01/26/smoke-free-world-letter/>.