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## AN EVALUATION OF THE IMPACTS OF MINIMUM AGE OF TOBACCO SALES LAWS ON YOUTH SMOKING IN CANADA, 2000-2014

Russell C Callaghan<sup>a</sup>, Jodi Gatley<sup>a</sup>, Marcos Sanches<sup>b</sup> and Claire Benny<sup>a</sup><sup>a</sup>NMP UNBC, Canada<sup>b</sup>CAMH, Canada

**Background:** Recently, experts from the United States and Canada concluded that raising the minimum age for tobacco sales (MATS) from 18-19 years to 21 years of age would have a substantial impact on reducing smoking among young people. Currently, MATS laws are 18 years of age in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Québec, the Yukon and Northwest Territories, and 19 years of age in the rest of the country. Research on MATS laws is lacking.

**Aims/Hypotheses:** The current proposal used a regression-discontinuity approach to assess the impacts of current Canadian MATS laws on youth smoking behavior. It was expected that immediately following the release from MATS restrictions, there would be significant and abrupt increases in self-reported current-smoker status in the youth population.

**Data sources:** The project relied on smoking-related data from 7 merged cycles of the 2000-2014 Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), a national population-based health survey of Canadians aged 12+ years.

**Findings:** In comparison to youth slightly younger than Canadian MATS laws, those just older had significant and abrupt increases of approximately 5 percentage points in current-smoker prevalence—from approximately 20% to 25% ( $p < 0.001$ )—immediately following the MATS age. There was no evidence showing significant impacts of the MATS laws on number of cigarettes smoked or days smoked among current smokers ( $p > 0.05$ ).

**Conclusion:** Release from MATS restrictions was associated with significant and immediate increases in population-level current-smoker prevalence among young people. As a result, it seems reasonable to suggest that higher MATS laws might have tremendous potential to reduce youth smoking initiation and subsequent long-term general-population prevalence of smoking in Canada.

### Biography

Russ Callaghan is an Associate Professor in the Northern Medical Program at the University of Northern British Columbia. Over the last 15 years, his substantive area of research has focused on alcohol and drug addiction, especially the long-term health trajectories associated with substance use and the impacts of alcohol and drug policies on population-level outcomes. His current work on Canadian youth tobacco-control policies aims to understand the effects of current age-based tobacco-sales restrictions on youth smoking.

russell.callaghan@unbc.ca

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