

APPENDIX A:

Summary of Stakeholder Consultations on Hookah Use

Between October 2014 and January 2015, Toronto Public Health (TPH) conducted stakeholder consultations to inform measures to address the health risks of hookah use at Toronto commercial establishments, learn about attitudes, level of awareness of the health risks associated with hookah use, and the impact of a possible prohibition on hookah use in commercial establishments. Since the methodology for this phase of the research was qualitative, it is not representative but rather provides directional, thematic and insight-driven findings in this domain.

Interviews were conducted with the following six stakeholder groups:

1. Patrons of Hookah Businesses
2. Businesses
 - a. Hookah Business Owners
 - b. Business Improvement Areas (BIAs)
 - c. Neighbouring Businesses (that do not serve hookah)
3. Ethnocultural Organizations
4. Community Health Centres (CHCs)
5. Health Organizations
6. Universities and Colleges

Some overall themes and key findings are as follows:

- There is a need for raising awareness about the health risks of hookah smoking.
- There is a need to use education methods appropriate to the different intended audiences such as young people, older adults, business operators.
- Visiting hookah establishments is a social and cultural practice for some patrons.
- Nearly half of patrons interviewed would still visit the businesses even if they did not offer hookah smoking.
- There are mixed views to a possible prohibition dependant on the stakeholder type (some are for, some are against and some are neutral).

The remaining sections describe in greater detail the findings from the consultation by stakeholder group.

1. Patrons of Hookah Establishments

Ipsos Reid was commissioned by TPH to conduct intercept interviews among patrons of establishments in Toronto where hookah is offered. This component of the consultation underwent Research Ethics Review. The purpose of the interviews was to:

- Understand awareness and perceptions of health risks among persons who visit hookah businesses.
- Inform education activities related to health risks of hookah smoking.

Ipsos conducted intercept interviews with 100 patrons of hookah establishments across Toronto. The patrons over the age of 18 were interviewed as they were either entering or exiting one of the establishments in the City of Toronto where hookah is offered. The establishments that were

selected were based on a review of locations provided by TPH in three areas of the city (Danforth, Lawrence Avenue East and Dundas Street – close to Ryerson University). In total, there were 13 sites from which patrons were recruited.

Toronto Public Health sent a letter to all known business operators in advance, informing them that this research would be conducted. Some of these businesses served food and some did not. Interviewing of patrons took place primarily in the afternoon and evening between the hours of 2 p.m. and 10 p.m.

Key findings are as follows:

- The age and gender of patrons of hookah businesses were:
 - Over three quarters (77%) were men;
 - 54% are under age 25;
 - 22% are 25-34;
 - 21% are 35-54 and
 - 3% are over 55.
- The majority of patrons (61%) visited hookah businesses at least a couple of times a week to smoke – 24% of this group are smoking at hookah bars on a daily basis. Twenty percent visit a couple of times a month. One-in-ten were first time visitors to a hookah business.
- Daily smokers tend to be male and although the largest share of first-time visitors were females, the majority of females interviewed visit hookah bars less frequently (couple of times a week/month).
- Almost half (48%) identify their ethnic background as Middle Eastern.
- The majority of patrons (65%) indicate that the primary reason for visiting hookah businesses is because it is a place where they like to socialize with friends. Sixteen percent believe that it is a good place to meet people with the same cultural background and one-in-ten visit hookah bars because of the selection of shisha. Four percent of visitors are not actually smoking but rather, visiting with family or friends.
- Half of smokers (46%) said they would still visit these establishments even if hookah was not served.
- Four-in-ten hookah smokers interviewed are aware that the air quality of these establishments has been found to expose customers and workers to harmful air pollution levels. None of the three patrons over age 55 were aware of this.
- Half of hookah smokers interviewed are aware that hookah smoke contains many of the same chemicals found in cigarette smoke including carbon monoxide and nicotine.
- Just over one third (37%) of patrons were concerned about the health risks associated with hookah smoking. Those aged 35 and over were least or not at all concerned with the health risks.

2. Businesses

Three business sectors were included in the consultations. These were hookah establishment owners, BIAs and neighbouring businesses that do not serve hookahs. Ipsos Reid carried out all of the interviews for this sector on behalf of TPH. The objectives of these consultations were:

- To learn about the attitudes and opinions related to hookah use.
- To determine the level of awareness of the health risks associated with hookah use.

- To identify the impact of a prohibition on hookah use.

a. Hookah Business Owners

Toronto Public Health provided Ipsos with a list of 71 known hookah business owners. Ipsos tried all 71 entries, and only 14 were successfully reached and recruited. In the letter sent to the hookah business owners, they were notified of the possibility of being contacted for an interview by Ipsos. Many of the contact telephone numbers were not in service. Ipsos Reid conducted one-on-one telephone interviews with the 14 hookah business owners contacted across Toronto to understand the impact that prohibition would have on their business.

Key findings are as follows:

- Most establishments stated they offer only herbal shisha; some allow tobacco shisha use on an outdoor patio.
- Hookah establishments are seen as an important social/cultural alternative to pubs and bars, where patrons can gather without consuming alcohol.
- Most operators recognize that hookah use is not entirely healthy, but see herbal shisha as healthier than other legal substances such as tobacco and alcohol.
- These operators all stated that the vast majority of their business revenue comes from hookah use (roughly 70-90% of revenue). Remaining revenue comes from small refreshments, food or (sometimes) alcohol.
- Almost all of the interviewed operators believe that a prohibition on hookah use would result in the closure of their business.

b. Business Improvement Areas (BIAs)

Toronto Public Health provided Ipsos Reid with a list of three BIAs which represent areas known to have hookah businesses. Representatives for each of these BIAs were successfully reached and recruited.

Key findings from interviews with BIA representatives are as follows:

- They had mixed views about the potential health risks related to hookah smoking. While some felt the risks were notable, others did not. However, all agreed that hookah use is not a significant issue facing their community, because they did not believe the practice was common enough to warrant grave concern.
- Opinions were also mixed about a possible prohibition of hookah use in public places. While some felt operators would initially be impacted but would later adapt like those who experienced tobacco smoking restrictions, others stated that this issue was different due to the cultural significance of the practice.
- When asked what supports they believed would help if the prohibition were to move forward, they stated that they believe messaging to the public would be helpful in communicating the health risks of hookah use since many might be unaware. Most believed that this type of communication would be helpful whether or not the prohibition moves forward.

c. Neighbouring Businesses that do not offer hookah

Neighbouring businesses were identified by Ipsos by surveying neighbourhoods with existing hookah cafés and calling for recruitment. In depth interviews were conducted with nine

neighbouring businesses, all of which had a hookah business located either next door or within a few establishments of them. Given the commercial nature of the areas where hookah cafes are typically located, the majority of neighbouring businesses spoken to were either food service or retail.

Key findings from interviews with neighbouring businesses are as follows:

- The majority believed there are health risks associated with hookah smoking, but did not see the practice as a significant health issue facing the community because they did not see it as a widespread practice.
- The majority stated that the hookah business nearby has no impact on their business. Meanwhile, a few businesses stated a positive impact as the hookah businesses bring in traffic to the area. And, a couple of businesses also stated a negative impact due to the smell and litter created by hookah business patrons.
- Most felt that the number of hookah businesses in their neighbourhood had stayed about the same in the past year.
- Since impact on neighbouring businesses was viewed as mixed, so too were reactions to a possible prohibition. The majority stated a prohibition would have no impact. Meanwhile, a few stated a prohibition could decrease traffic to the neighbourhood and some stated for those impacted by the smell and litter of hookah businesses, a prohibition has positive potential to clean up these issues.

3. Cultural Organizations

Hookah use is a traditional way of smoking tobacco products predominantly practiced in Middle Eastern countries. However, the use of hookahs has recently increased in North America, particularly among youth and young adults. In Toronto, it is also a practice of people from Middle Eastern and other specific cultural communities. As a result, TPH consulted with a number of cultural organizations based in Toronto and the GTA in order to hear their views on how TPH can protect the health of their community members from hookah use and second hand smoke in public places and how TPH can reduce the impacts that a restriction or prohibition on hookah use in public places might have on their community as a whole. Four cultural organizations participated in this consultation serving the Iranian, Somalian, Arab and Turkish communities in Toronto and the GTA.

In the opinion of the community representatives/leaders interviewed:

- Even though hookah use has been a common practice particularly among the older population, there is a growing trend of hookah use among youth.
- Overall, there is very limited or no knowledge of the health risks associated with hookahs.
- Hookahs are considered a lighter form of smoking and the belief is that water filters the hazardous material.
- Herbal shisha is perceived to be safe (it is an herb); ingredients are not questioned.
- People like the flavoured shisha and have favourites.
- Educational campaigns and resources to increase awareness about the health risks associated with hookah use are lacking; there is no information out there to stress the risk therefore educational material would be welcome.

- The business sector will be mainly affected if a prohibition was to be imposed and they will experience an economic impact.
- Toronto patrons may go to the hookah bars in neighbouring York Region (e.g. Richmond Hill) where the numbers of these establishments are also on the rise.

Additional themes that emerged based on what the interviewees perceived and which were community specific are:

- In one of these communities, a substantial portion of households is estimated to have a hookah; the women smoke inside the homes in the presence of children for a few hours a day and the men go to hookah bars to smoke hookah.
- There is a major problem regarding smoke from hookah and poor ventilation in these residences.
- With a prohibition on hookah use in establishments more people will likely shift to hookah smoking indoors in their homes.
- Disposable mouth pieces are not necessarily used when hookahs are shared among groups of people.

4. Community Health Centres (CHCs)

TPH consulted with a number of community health centres (CHCs) in Toronto in order to hear their views on how TPH can protect the health of their clientele from hookah use and second hand smoke in public places as well as how TPH can reduce the impacts that a restriction or prohibition on hookah use in public places might have on the community as a whole. TPH conducted interviews with four Toronto CHCs.

Key findings are as follows:

- There is a growing trend in hookah use in the community and clients they serve.
- There is little awareness about the health risks from hookah use among the population (young or old).
- Clients perceive smoking hookahs, especially the herbal shisha, to be safer and less addictive than smoking cigarettes.
- CHCs were receptive to receiving educational material and the fact sheet that was prepared by TPH in several languages (English, Arabic, Farsi, French, Urdu, Turkish and Somalian). One CHC healthcare provider in particular was very keen on having TPH provide a workshop for their staff to raise awareness of the issue.
- The healthcare providers are themselves in favour of a prohibition but they did not have any recommendations that could help reduce the impact that a prohibition on hookah use might have on the community.
- Their recommendation to TPH was to start educating people in the communities where there is a lot of hookah activity so that those communities realize that they should start redirecting or rethinking their hookah practices in light of the health risks and some upcoming changes to policy.

5. Health Organizations

Interviews with the following health organizations were carried out by TPH staff: Non-Smokers Rights Association, the Ontario Tobacco Research Unit, the Ontario Lung Association and the Canadian Cancer Society-Ontario Division.

Key findings are as follows:

- All health organizations interviewed actively research the health risks of hookah smoking, and some promote this information to the public, community partners and other health units.
- All believe that awareness of the health risks is low among the Toronto population as a whole.
- These health organizations perceive a prohibition on hookah use as beneficial to Toronto residents as a whole. They predict hookah establishments will suffer in the short term, but will likely adapt by focusing on other aspects of their business.
- Public education is critical to inform the public of the health risks of shisha use and to reduce the impact that a prohibition might have on affected businesses and communities.

6. Universities and Colleges

TPH conducted interviews with four representatives from local universities and colleges. These included health promotion staff, health and safety staff and a student association representative.

The key perceptions from these participants were as follows:

- Students are likely unaware of the health risks of hookah use, particularly the herbal product.
- Public education is needed to increase student awareness of the health risks.
- A prohibition on hookah use in commercial establishments would not have a large impact on campus life, as most students go off campus to smoke shisha. However, it would send a strong message to students about the health risks of hookah use.