



# Poll

By James Wallace  
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## **Ontario voters support province-wide smoking ban**

A Liberal campaign promise to impose a province-wide ban on smoking in public places is broadly supported by Ontario voters, a poll by SES Research/Osprey News has found. "Right now there's a patchwork of policies across Ontario," said Nikita Nanos, president of SES Canada Research.

"I think that although not everyone may be in favour of a 100% smoking ban across Ontario, many are in favour of a consistent policy," Nanos said.

The poll found 55% back a ban on smoking in workplaces and other public locations, that 35% believe local municipalities should decide whether or not to outlaw smoking within their jurisdiction and 10% were unsure.

Sandra Pupatello, deputy Liberal leader and the party's health critic, said there's "no doubt" the policy will be controversial.

"It's a difficult issue," Pupatello said. "All of us have watched the infighting that's gone on across the province as municipalities wrestled with this issue."

But tobacco use and second-hand smoke carry a \$4 billion price tag for Ontario's health care system and causes 12,000 deaths annually in Ontario, the Liberals estimate.

"It's time," Pupatello said. "This should have happened a lot time ago."

Under current Ontario law, the decision to outlaw smoking in public is a municipal responsibility.

More than 350 communities have some kind of bylaw or policy on smoking, ranging from outright bans in cities such as Kingston, Guelph, Barrie and North Bay to partial bans in places such as Sarnia, Peterborough and Toronto to milder restrictions in most other municipalities.



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The proposed Liberal law would make it illegal to smoke in any Ontario workplace or public area within three years including restaurants, bars, bowling alleys, shopping malls or retail stores, taxis, casinos or even Legion Halls. There would be no exceptions to the law.

It would be part of a broader anti-smoking strategy that would see the government raise \$700 million annually by hiking cigarette taxes by \$10 per carton. Most of the money would be directed to health care spending but \$50 million would be set aside in a “community transition fund” to pay Ontario farmers to get out of the tobacco-growing business.

Other components of strategy would force variety stores and other tobacco retailers to hide tobacco products behind the counter, fund programs to help smokers quit and pay for a mass media anti-smoking campaign aimed at convincing teens not to take up smoking.

“Giving up smoking is one of the worst, most difficult things to do on the planet,” said Pupatello, a former smoker herself. “I’m constantly falling off the wagon.”

Nanos said the broader Liberal strategy reinforces the image that the Liberals are proactive on health care, an area which continues to be a weakness for the ruling Tories.

It will also likely garner support from doctors and health care workers, allies who can further cement public impressions during the upcoming election that the Liberals are strong on health care issues.

“This could be seen as bit of a stalking horse for the Liberals,” Nanos said.

Pupatello acknowledged the campaign policy plays to Liberal strengths but said it also demonstrates her party is willing to show leadership and set an agenda on difficult issues. “This isn’t just about smokers, it’s about everybody else,” she said.

The poll of 500 Ontario voters was conducted on May 26 and May 27. It is statistically accurate within 4.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20 and was registered with the Canadian Survey Research Council.

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