



## Questions and Answers about the Smoke-Free Properties Policy

### Q: **Why is Western Health undertaking this initiative?**

A: The vision of Western Health is of healthy people, living in healthy communities. In support of this vision, the goal of this policy is to create a healthy environment for employees, doctors, volunteers, clients, residents, patients, and visitors. As a health organization, we have a responsibility to be role models by developing and supporting policies in the best interests of health and wellness.

### Q: **How does this policy differ from our existing smoking policies/practices?**

A: Prior to now, our policies and practices prohibited smoking inside of our hospitals but allowed smoking in outdoor areas for employees, volunteers, patients and visitors (i.e., beyond certain radius, marked in some areas by a blue line). Effective July 1, 2008, all our grounds will be smoke free, including parking lots and vehicles on the premises.

### Q: **Why can't individuals smoke outside Western Health facilities?**

A: Smoking is a leading preventable cause of disease and death and represents a major healthcare epidemic in our country. Second-hand smoke has been proven hazardous to people's health. As a healthcare provider, we believe our clients, patients, residents, visitors, employees, doctors, volunteers and our community at large will see a significant health benefit as a result of implementing this new initiative. It is the right thing to do for the health of us all.

### Q: **There has always been a designated smoking area – why is this being eliminated?**

A: Western Health is committed to ensuring a healthy community. Providing a place to smoke does not support that mission and vision. Research shows that designated areas do not protect non-smokers from the effects of second-hand smoke. Providing a place to smoke does not support our goal to create a healthier environment for our patients, clients, residents, families, employees, doctors, volunteers, and visitors.

### Q: **Does the policy apply to residents in long term care?**

A: The new policy applies to everyone. The goal of the new policy is to ultimately work towards a 100% smoke-free environment, including long term care. We realize that this change in long term care settings will take some time, and we are working toward alternatives and supports for residents who currently smoke.



**Q: What is Western Health doing to help employees who smoke? Are there resources to help employees with the transition?**

A: Western Health will have resources and educational materials available, including both materials to help communicate the new policy and information to help individuals in their own efforts to stop smoking. Cessation programs will be provided. Subject to operational requirements, employees may be permitted to attend Cessation programs on work time. This program includes self help materials and referral to the Smokers Help Line. For more information on any smoking cessation programs, contact the Health Education Consultant, at 709-637-5000 extension 5355.

**Q: Can employees smoke on their break?**

A: Yes, as long as they smoke off the property and return in the allotted time.

**Q: Can people smoke in their vehicles?**

A: No. Smoking is not permitted in any parking areas, including vehicles on the premises.

**Q: Why ban smoking in vehicles on the property?**

A: Western Health believes that if smoking was permitted in vehicles:

- Public and staff would be smoking in a confined space and we would be supporting a very unhealthy behavior.
- Staff would return to work with an intensified smoke odor on their clothing due to smoking in a confined space. Western Health also has a Scent Free Policy. This intensified odor can harm certain individuals who have allergies to smoke.
- Our property would not be smoke free.

**Q: What about individual rights?**

A: Your individual right to choose to smoke is respected. You are not being asked to quit smoking. However, health authorities and other employers also have the right to create a healthy environment for those they serve. For this reason, we ask that individuals refrain from smoking on the property.



**Q: What happens if I continue to smoke on Western Health properties?**

A: As with any other policy, staff will be coached regarding expectations and held accountable to meeting those expectations. As with any other administrative policy, offenders will be subject to the progressive discipline process.

- All patients/clients/residents, employees, physicians, volunteers, and the general public have shared responsibility for supporting and complying with the Smoke-Free Properties policy.
- In areas where there are Security staff, they are responsible for patrolling entrances and grounds to ensure that all persons are in compliance with the policy.
- At sites where there are no Security staff, Managers must enforce the policy.
- Employees who do not comply with the policy will be subject to disciplinary action per collective agreements and the organization's human resources policies.

**Q: What about patients in hospitals?**

A: We will provide our patients with information about resources to help them quit smoking on a permanent basis.

**Q: How do patients (in hospital) who smoke seek help?**

A: Upon admission, patients will be encouraged to notify the admissions staff if they smoke. This information will be forwarded to their physician, who can discuss resources available. Outpatients will be assessed for tobacco use and offered smoking cessation support and referral.

**Q: Can patients/clients go off-site to smoke?**

A: Patients/clients who request to leave the property to smoke will be informed that the entire premises are smoke-free and that by leaving the property to smoke, they may be placing themselves at risk for medical complications. There is also a risk of injury, as staff will not accompany people off the property. If a patient wishes to smoke, he/she will have to assume responsibility for his/her own safety.

**Q: Will employees/volunteers be expected to ask people to stop smoking?**

A: Yes. We are all responsible for maintaining a healthy environment and for supporting, promoting and enforcing this policy. It is a shared responsibility. We understand that people may feel uncomfortable in approaching people and asking them to not smoke on hospital property. All employees who see patients and visitors smoking on the property should be courteous in informing them of the smoke-free policy. For example: "maybe you haven't heard of our new policy... for the health of our patients, our grounds are 100% smoke-free"/You can share an enforcement card with them. This helpful card shares information about our policy and resources to help someone quit.



**Q: If a visitor, client or patient refuses to stop smoking, what can be done?**

A: If employees have given the visitor, client or patient a reminder card and asked politely that they stop smoking, than we have done our best. Cultural changes like this can take time, and we cannot expect everyone to be compliant right away. In facilities where security staff are present, you may also draw upon their assistance and support.

**Q: How is Western Health educating the public about this policy?**

A: Western Health created and provided information and educational materials that were distributed throughout its facilities and posted on its website. In July signs will be posted at the perimeter of our facilities and entrances. While we will make every effort to inform patients and their family members prior to their admission in hospital, we can expect that some patients and their families will arrive unprepared for a hospitalization experience with no smoking. We will also educate our staff in ways to interact with patients/clients and their family members who are have difficulty adhering to the policy.

**Q: What about clients who receive services in their home? Since this a client's home, does this policy apply?**

A: As an employer, Western Health has a responsibility to protect its employees from the harmful effects of exposure to second hand smoke. Western Health has the Smoke Free Protocol for Services Provided by Home Based Environments to protect staff from exposure to second hand smoke while in your home. We request that your home be smoke free one hour prior to and during a visit by an employee. Employees will also refrain from smoking while providing services to you.

**Q: Where can I get more information about smoking cessation services?**

A: If you would like more information on how to quit smoking, please speak with your local health care provider (physician, health educator, nurse, or other health care provider) or call the Smokers Helpline at 1-800-363-5864.