

ONTARIO'S YOUTH GATHER TO TAKE!ACTION AGAINST SMOKING

*FIRST-EVER SMOKE-FREE ONTARIO YOUTH SUMMIT STIMULATES
AN ACTIVE VOICE*

Toronto, March 3, 2006 – The lyrics of a legendary pop song once told us that children are our future and that we should teach them well and let them lead the way. The Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion in conjunction with The Lung Association, clearly feel the same way as they are gathering 300 youth from across Ontario to Take!Action, the first annual Smoke-Free Ontario Youth Summit held at the Double Tree International Plaza and Hotel in Toronto from Friday March 3 until Sunday March 5, 2006.

“It’s time to take action against tobacco,” says Ratsamy Pathammavong, Tobacco Control Manager at The Lung Association. “This generation has a strong voice and demands to be heard.”

The Youth Action Alliances (YAA) are comprised of young people between the ages of 12 and 18 years whose passion and dedication to the Smoke-Free Ontario movement more than makes up for any inexperience. There are 31 YAAs situated across the province in 20 different public health units. Each group, guided by adult Youth Advisors, takes their informed concerns and actions into their respective communities primarily through grassroots advocacy initiatives.

“The youth participating in Take!Action are pioneers of the Smoke-Free Ontario movement,” says Ontario Minister of Health Promotion, Jim Watson who attended the Summit. “Through their ideas and tobacco control advocacy the Youth Action Alliance is

setting an excellent example, preventing the next generation of young people from taking up smoking.”

Currently the average age at which a young person starts to smoke is 12 years. Many of the youth members have been personally affected by the impact of commercial tobacco, driving their passion to help stop the tobacco use epidemic among youth and prevent others from starting the highly addictive habit.

“The Lung Association’s Youth Advocacy Training Institute (YATI) has provided training and support to the Youth Action Alliances to engage and empower these youth in the fight against commercial tobacco,” says Pathammavong. “This is the first time all the Youth Action Alliance members have come together to share their respective strengths, develop strategies and, importantly, to raise their voice against the tobacco industry in support of a smoke free future. “

The Take!Action Summit offers these youth advocates valuable learning opportunities where the intricacies of tobacco control are explored, assisting them in their quest towards a smoke free Ontario.

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For further information contact:
Lauren Wolff
416-451-2061