

Peers to ask peers to butt it out ³

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If you want to send an effective anti-smoking message to high schoolers, send a student, or better yet a group of students, to deliver it.

That's the premise behind a \$205,000 grant going to new anti-smoking youth alliances being created in Mississauga and Brampton as part of recently-approved Smoke-Free Ontario legislation.

"I don't know what the cool music is or how to dress, which is important to your credibility if you're trying to talk to teens," says Dr. Howard Shapiro, Peel Region's Acting Medical Officer of Health. "We need to understand how teens think and provide the information in a language they will be receptive to."

"That's why peer-to-peer training makes so much sense," added Shapiro. "They aren't going to listen to some guy walking around in a suit."

As a result, the government has mandated that every high school in Ontario receive \$1,000 so students can create anti-smoking messages for other students. Research shows that is a much more effective way to get teens' attention than traditional "smoking is a bad thing" messages, Shapiro said.

"It's a time of their life when people are trying to establish their own independence," said Shapiro of the high school years. "They're concerned about parental control and they're certainly concerned about people trying to control them to make money."

Students will be given wide latitude in coming up with their own in-school programs. Leaders will be trained for each school and then the brainstorming will begin, Shapiro said.

"The programs will reflect what's important to them," he said. "They could make a video or they could concentrate on a variety store or another certain public place. There could be specific issues that are in their school that they want to explore."

Peel is receiving a total of \$611,000 in additional money to bolster its anti-smoking program.

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