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## *Introduction: The Problem of Tobacco-Control Policy*

“The cigarette was, and still is, the most profitable consumer product ever sold legally.” (Stoffman 1987: 20)

“Smoking represents the most extensively documented cause of disease ever investigated in the history of biomedical research.” (1990 US Surgeon General’s report, as quoted in Davis 1992: 1)

“There can be no question that if cigarettes were a food or drug or being newly marketed, their sale would have to be prohibited or strongly regulated on the basis of evidence now available...” (Isabelle 1969: 9)

### **Introduction**

Tobacco control is both an old and a new public policy issue. In recent years tobacco control has engaged governmental and public attention on a regular basis in both Canada and the United States. Battles over regulation, taxes, and litigation against tobacco companies have made headlines and generated political conflict.

Yet an examination of the historical record shows that a restrictive tobacco-control policy, especially focussed on cigarettes, has appeared on the political agendas of both the general public and the government periodically in the past. This occurred especially around the turn of the twentieth century, largely on moral grounds, and again mid-century based on rising concerns about the health effects of cigarettes. In both previous instances, concern about restricting cigarette usage receded after a time, and the politics of tobacco returned largely to one of promoting tobacco as an economically profitable product for growers and companies, society at large, and government tax coffers. For our purposes, even tobacco