

## HARM REDUCTION CONFERENCE

CALGARY, ALBERTA  
NOVEMBER 14, 2019

Good morning and welcome.

My name is Jeff Gaulin and I am an executive with Rothmans, Benson & Hedges, one of the driving forces behind today's harm reduction conference.

We are grateful to gather here today in the spirit of healing on the traditional territories of the people of the Blackfoot Confederacy (Siksika, Kainai, Piikani), the Tsuut'ina, the Îyâxe Nakoda Nations, the Métis Nation (Region 3), and all people who make their homes in the Treaty 7 region of southern Alberta.

As someone of Métis ancestry from Ontario, I am pleased to welcome you to today's conference – the first of what we hope becomes a regular gathering of Indigenous health-care professionals, researchers, academics and policy leaders.

I am honroed to see so many great people gathered to explore how we can take bold steps in reducing the risk and harm for people in our families and in our communities.

New events such as this are extremely hard to launch and organize, so I want to thank each of you for your personal commitment to be here today.

I would also like to thank Lova Beebe, Catherine Naylen, Karen Donnelly and Belinda Fox for assembling such an amazing group for such a critical discussion.

**[PAUSE]**

So why is the world's largest maker of cigarettes assembling a harm reduction conference?

Because we are transforming – our company, our products, our place in society.

Ultimately, we want to get out of the cigarette business.

And as we say, we want to “Unsmoke” Canada.

We hope everyone in this room would agree with us that the best choice for every Canadian - Indigenous and non – is never to start smoking or to quit entirely.

That is our message of Unsmoke: if you don't smoke, don't start; if you smoke, quit. If you don't quit, change.

Prevention is key. Cessation is essential.

But transition is also needed as a complementary, harm-reduction approach to tobacco or nicotine.

Fortunately, scientific innovations now give current adult smokers – including more than 300,000 Indigenous smokers – new technology options that can transition them away from harmful cigarettes.

While these smoke-free technologies are not risk free and contain nicotine, which is addictive, a strong and growing body of scientific evidence is showing they are much better alternatives compared to cigarettes.

That's because technologies such as vaping or heating both deal with the main problem of smoking – the emission of thousands of toxic chemicals in the smoke caused by combustion.

By eliminating combustion, these technologies release fewer toxic chemicals overall and in much smaller doses.

And that is the harm-reduction pillar of our Unsmoke transformation: if you don't quit, change.

**[PAUSE]**

Just as we are transforming our business and our culture, we hope to transform our past relationship with Canada's Indigenous people to create a new and better future together.

We acknowledge the history of commercial tobacco production – the making and marketing of cigarettes – has tarnished the traditional sacredness of tobacco in Indigenous culture.

And it has contributed to an extremely high prevalence of smoking among Indigenous peoples – about three times the national average.

In the past tobacco companies have appropriated indigenous identity and disrespectfully misused it to make money. For that I am sorry.

But at RBH we are as committed to reconciliation as we are to harm reduction. We are pursuing the recommendations of the Truth & Reconciliation Commission for corporate Canada.

This includes education for our management and staff on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal–Crown relations.

We have joined the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business to identify and pursue meaningful economic partnerships that can create and support jobs, training and education opportunities for Indigenous people.

Finally, we are exploring partnerships to create more training and educational supports for Indigenous post-secondary students – especially in STEM careers – to create the leaders of tomorrow.

**[PAUSE]**

So, I hope that today generates thoughtful discussion and leads to concrete actions.

More clinical research and behavioral supports are needed to understand how best to reduce the volume and frequency of exposure to harmful chemicals for smokers, for the people who share a home or a car with them, and the people in their community who care for them.

We want to raise the awareness and understanding of harm reduction choices.

We want to boost acceptance and credibility of harm-reduction options.

And we want to unite in action.

I'm done talking – now it's time for me to learn. So that is my request of you.

Please help educate companies such as mine on ways that we could support Indigenous harm reduction. Tell us how we can better support the work in your communities. Please speak up during the panel discussions.

I will be listening. And learning. And transforming.

**MEEGWETCH**