

Cancer luncheon offers participants tips on making disease election issue

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PRINCE ALBERT — Lunch with friends was about more than food for local women on Wednesday as they gathered to discuss cancer and ways to make it an election issue.

Donna Ziegler, the Canadian Cancer Society's director of cancer control, spoke to the crowd at the Travelodge outlining three main areas the group wants to raise as election issues — increasing current funding for programs to reduce tobacco use; restricting youth under 18 from using indoor tanning equipment; and phasing out the sale and use of cosmetic and ornamental pesticides.

A total of \$1 million is spent annually on tobacco reduction, she explained. Zeigler added the government is collecting \$250 million in tobacco taxes in the same timeframe, so she urged that more money from that should be spent to reduce tobacco use.

Zeigler said the risk of developing melanoma increases by 75 per cent if indoor tanning equipment is used before the age of 35, so she said preventing youth from using tanning beds will protect them in the long run.

Zeigler said that five provinces have banned the use and sale of garden pesticides, noting that Regina and Saskatoon have followed the trend in some of their parks. She said the phase out of the chemical products should be done to prevent cancer from developing.

"The Canadian Cancer Society wants to urge the government to try and move from being reactive in our health care to trying to be more proactive in our health care," she said.

"We know that half of our tax dollars goes to health care. We have an opportunity to influence how that money is spent."

Zeigler noted that 40 per cent of women and 45 per cent of men will be diagnosed with cancer in their lifetime. She said that cancer is the leading cause of death in Canada and that 5,200 people will be diagnosed in the province this year and about 2,350 will lose their life.

Barbara McKnight was among the women who attended the event. She said that cancer has deeply affected her, and the points raised during the talk resonated with her.

"I thought her points were very valid. Change is only going to come with public input, saying what needs to be done and what the issues are," she noted, adding, "I don't think there's a family anywhere in the country that hasn't been affected."

Wanda Tokarchik is a cancer survivor. She had a mastectomy a couple months ago and has been feeling much better. Tokarchik said the one point she wants people to know is the importance of getting tested and added that seeing so many people at the event and trying to make cancer a provincial issue is heartwarming.

"It chokes me up when I think about all the good that's been done. I think it's a wonderful thing when so many people come together for such a great cause," she said.

For more information see www.voteforhealthsk.ca.