

Study reveals true cost of smoking to the Territory

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Smoking tobacco costs the Territory more than \$5,000 per Territorian aged over 14 years, according to a new study conducted by the South Australian Centre for Economic Studies for the Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies).

The study estimated total costs of Territory smoking at \$764 million in the year 2005 - 2006.

Report author and Deputy Director of the SA Centre for Economic Studies, Steve Whetton said the cost of smoking was even more than the estimated social costs of alcohol (\$642 million or \$4197 per person) in the Territory in the same year.

“Smoking is much more common in the Territory than in the rest of the country, especially among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Territorians,” Mr Whetton said.

More than 50% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Territorian adults and just under 30% of non-Indigenous Territorians smoke, although these numbers are coming down.

“The costs of tobacco smoking to the Territory are significant and are driven largely by the early deaths caused by smoking (with a social cost of \$554 million), from diseases such as lung cancer, emphysema and heart disease. The report estimated that a total of 169 Territory deaths were caused by smoking in the year 2005/6.

“Smoking caused increased Territory health care costs (by \$36 million, and accounted for 6.5% of hospital bed days) and lost economic output in the Territory, including increased absenteeism (costing \$20 million).”

Menzies' Associate Professor David Thomas welcomed the findings of the report and reiterated the need for continued government support to reduce smoking.

“The enormous costs and suffering caused by smoking justify the recent increase in attention and funding to reduce smoking, especially among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Territorians,” he said.

“These new programs need to be continued and carefully monitored and evaluated.”

The full report is available at:

[http://menzies.edu.au/sites/menzies.edu.au/files/file/Publications/CostofSmokingintheNTFinalReport%20April%202013%20\(2\).pdf](http://menzies.edu.au/sites/menzies.edu.au/files/file/Publications/CostofSmokingintheNTFinalReport%20April%202013%20(2).pdf)

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Background: Menzies School of Health Research is a national leader in Indigenous and tropical health research. It is the only medical research institute in the Northern Territory, with more than 300 staff working in over 60 communities across central and northern Australia, as well as developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Menzies is also a significant contributor to health education and research training.