

National survey reveals large decline in Indigenous smoking rates

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Recently released results from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) have revealed a significant decline in smoking rates amongst Australia's Indigenous population.

The ABS Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey found that national Indigenous daily smoking rates (aged 15+) fell from 45 per cent in 2008 to 41 per cent in 2012.

Head of the Menzies School of Health Research's Tobacco Control Program and Chair of the Northern Territory Control Advisory Committee, Associate Professor David Thomas has welcomed the latest ABS results.

"This is terrific news as lower smoking rates will mean a reduction in the number of chronic diseases and early deaths caused by smoking among Indigenous populations," Assoc Prof Thomas said.

"This one per cent annual decline in Indigenous smoking rates from 2008 to 2012 is great news, and follows the decline that started before 2008.

"This has mainly been due to a large reduction in smoking uptake by young Indigenous people, but there is also evidence that more and more Indigenous smokers are successfully quitting. These successful quitters and non-smokers should be congratulated.

"These declines in Indigenous smoking have occurred at a time of massive increase in government investment and attention in tackling Indigenous smoking complementing increased Indigenous concern and activity about smoking."

Assoc Prof Thomas said he was heartened by the new Australian Minister of Health, Peter Dutton's public statements about prioritising the need to tackle Indigenous smoking.

"These new results suggest that it has been possible to make a large impact on Indigenous smoking rates," he said.

"The new government can build on these successes in partnership with Indigenous organisations and communities by building on the existing Indigenous Tackling Smoking program and mainstream tobacco control activities."

Assoc Prof Thomas however pointed out that Indigenous smoking rates had not fallen as quickly in remote parts of Australia.

"The Indigenous daily smoking rate in remote areas was 50 per cent compared with 38 per cent in non-remote Australia," he said.

"More detailed examination of ABS and other research evidence will be required in coming months to understand what has caused these declines and why these declines have not occurred for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities."

The summary of the key findings of the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey can be viewed here:

<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4727.0.55.001main+features802012-13>

Media note:

Head of Menzies' Tobacco Control Program and Chair of the Northern Territory Control Advisory Committee, Associate Professor David Thomas is available for further comment.

View his profile at: [http://www.menzies.edu.au/page/Our People/Researchers/David Thomas/](http://www.menzies.edu.au/page/Our_People/Researchers/David_Thomas/)

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Menzies Background

Menzies School of Health Research is Australia's only Medical Research Institute dedicated to improving Indigenous health and wellbeing. We have a 28-year history of scientific discovery and public health achievement. Menzies works at the frontline, partnering with over 60 Indigenous communities across Northern and Central Australia. We collaborate to create resources, grow local skills and find enduring solutions to problems that matter.