

Recent legislative changes will reduce smoking harms in the Territory

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Legislative changes announced by the Northern Territory and Australian Governments in the last year will make a significant contribution to reducing the harm that smoking causes in the Territory, according to the independent Annual Report on Tobacco Control in the Northern Territory released for World No Tobacco Day, 31 May.

Smoking is responsible for 21 per cent of the life expectancy gap between Indigenous and other Territorian men, and 14 per cent for women.

The Annual Report of the NT Tobacco Control Advisory Committee (NTTCAC) welcomes the announcement in February that the NT Government will legislate to prohibit smoking in cars whilst children are present.

“This is a belated but significant positive decision to help protect our children from second hand smoke,” said committee chairman Associate Professor David Thomas of the Menzies School of Health Research.

“The NT is the last jurisdiction to announce these changes, and we have called for these changes in every previous Annual Report.”

The Australian Government introduced the first of four 12.5 per cent increases in the tobacco excise in September 2013, to be followed by further increases in December 2014, 2015 and 2016.

“Increasing tobacco taxes is the most effective way a country can reduce smoking,” Assoc Prof Thomas said.

Assoc Prof Thomas said that following the election of the new Australian government there has been great uncertainty about the future of the Tackling Indigenous Smoking program.

“Our committee is greatly concerned by the impact of this uncertainty on tobacco control activity, and supports continuing this program,” he said.

“Some of the work funded through this program in the Territory is described in the Annual Report.”

On 1 July 2013, the Territory became the first jurisdiction where all correctional facilities are entirely smoke free with Queensland following in 2014. A preliminary evaluation is currently underway.

“It appears that the implementation of the new policy has been smooth and well-supported.”

The Annual Report also describes the latest Territory smoking statistics and the further expansion of smoke-free areas protecting Territory children and non-smokers from the dangers of second-hand smoke.

NTTCAC was established three years ago by the NT Government to provide leadership and advice on tobacco control in the NT.

The full report is available at:

http://www.health.nt.gov.au/Alcohol_and_Other_Drugs/Tobacco/SmokeFree_NT/index.aspx

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Media note:

Associate Professor David Thomas has led the Tobacco Control Research Program at Menzies since 2007. View his researcher profile here:

http://www.menzies.edu.au/page/Our_People/Researchers/David_Thomas/

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.