

PETROL SNIFFING ON THE DECLINE IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Monday, 15 August 2016

Petrol sniffing rates in Indigenous communities have declined since the introduction of low aromatic unleaded fuel (LAF), a study by Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) has found. The results of this study were released today by Senator the Hon Nigel Scullion Minister for Indigenous Affairs.

The independent study, *Monitoring trends in the prevalence of petrol sniffing in selected Australian Aboriginal communities 2011-2014*, was commissioned by the Commonwealth Government. The research team was led by Professor Peter d'Abbs (Menzies) and Gillian Shaw (Bowchung).

Since 2011, the number of people sniffing petrol has fallen by almost 30 percent in the 41 communities examined in the study.

Over the longer term, the decline in petrol sniffing has been even more marked. In 17 communities from the study, comparable data was also available from 2005-06. In these 17 communities, sniffing incidence rates have fallen by 88 percent.

"The introduction of low aromatic fuel in remote communities has been associated with a continuing decline of the number of young people sniffing petrol," Prof d'Abbs explained.

"In addition to an overall decrease in the prevalence of sniffing, people who do sniff tend to do so less frequently, which suggests that less harm is being caused by petrol sniffing in Australia's remote and rural Indigenous communities than previously".

As well as monitoring trends of petrol sniffing, researchers conducted interviews with community members to understand how they felt about the introduction of LAF.

In most communities the introduction of LAF was widely supported, although in some places this was qualified by frustration regarding the continuing availability of regular unleaded petrol from other outlets.

The interviews also confirmed that many communities face ongoing problems with alcohol and cannabis use.

"While petrol sniffing is often part of a pattern of opportunistic poly drug use, the rise in cannabis use predates the introduction of LAF into communities, and cannot be attributed to LAF," Prof d'Abbs said.

The study found that in many communities there have been improvements in resourcing youth, recreation, and training opportunities, however, many communities still face continuing challenges.

Overall, the findings from the study show that improvements to community programs and services, combined with the effectiveness of LAF in preventing petrol sniffing, have helped to improve health and wellbeing and create sorely needed opportunities for young people.

A copy of the full report can be found online [here](#).

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Menzies School of Health Research

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