

Pack warning labels help Aboriginal smokers butt out

30 January, 2017

Pack warning labels are motivating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander smokers to quit smoking according to new research released by Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) today.

The study has shown that graphic warning labels not only motivate quit attempts but increase Indigenous smokers' awareness of the health issues caused by smoking.

Forming part of the national *Talking About The Smokes* study led by Menzies in partnership with Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services, the 642 study participants completed baseline surveys and follow-up surveys a year later.

The study found that 30% of Indigenous smokers at baseline said that pack warning labels had stopped them having a smoke when they were about to smoke.

Study leader, Menzies' Professor David Thomas said, 'This reaction rose significantly among smokers who were exposed to plain packaging for the first time during the period of research. The introduction of new and enlarged warning labels on plain packs had a positive impact upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander smokers.'

Professor David Thomas, explained the significance of this finding, 'Reacting to warning labels by forgoing a cigarette may not seem like much on its own. However, forgoing cigarettes due to warning labels was associated with becoming more concerned about the health consequences of smoking, developing an interest in quitting and attempting to quit. This is significant for our understanding of future tobacco control strategies.'

In addition, Indigenous smokers who said at baseline they often noticed warning labels on their packs were 80% more likely to identify the harms of smoking that have featured on warning labels.

Just under two in five (39%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 and over smoke daily. Smoking is responsible for 23% of the health gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians.

In 2012, pack warning labels in Australia were increased in size to 75% on the front of all packs and 90% of the back at the same time as tobacco plain packaging was introduced.

'Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services across 140 health settings are helping smokers in our communities to quit. Pack warning labels are also an important element as smokers read, think about and discuss large, prominent and

graphic labels. This comprehensive approach works to reduce Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander smoking and the harm it causes in our communities,' said Matthew Cooke from the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO).

The study was funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and published in the *Nicotine & Tobacco Research* journal and available at:

<http://ntr.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2017/01/08/ntr.ntw396.full.pdf+html>.

-ENDS-

Media note:

Professor David Thomas leads the *Talking About The Smokes* project and has led the Tobacco Control Research Program at Menzies since 2007.

View his profile at:

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

Anna Nicholson was the lead author of this paper and completed a PhD based on this work at Menzies before moving to Cancer Council Victoria.

Media contact:

Paul Dale, senior communications officer

Phone: 0439 108 754 or (08) 8946 8658 | Email: communications@menzies.edu.au

Menzies School of Health Research

Menzies School of Health Research is one of Australia's leading medical research institutes dedicated to improving Indigenous, global and tropical health. Menzies has a history of over 30 years of scientific discovery and public health achievement. Menzies works at the frontline, joining with partners across the Asia-Pacific as well as Indigenous communities across northern and central Australia. Menzies collaborates to create new knowledge, grow local skills and find enduring solutions to problems that matter.

Summary of findings

- The research is part of the Talking About the Smokes study http://www.menzies.edu.au/page/Research/Projects/Smoking/Talking_About_the_Smokes/
- A total of 642 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander smokers completed surveys at baseline (April 2012-October 2013) and follow-up (August 2013-August 2014)
- At baseline, 66% of smokers reported they had often noticed warning labels in the past month, 30% said they had stopped smoking due to warning labels in the past

month and 50% perceived that warning labels were somewhat or very effective to help them quit or stay quit

- At follow-up, an increase in stopping smoking due to warning labels was found only those first surveyed before plain packaging was introduced (19% vs 34%, $p=0.002$), but not for those surveyed during the phase-in period (34% vs 37%, $p=0.8$) or after it was mandated (35% vs 36%, $p=0.7$). There were no other differences in reactions to warning labels according to time periods associated with plain packaging.
- Smokers who reported they had stopped smoking due to warning labels in the month prior to baseline had 1.5 times the odds of quitting when compared with those who reported never doing so or never noticing labels (AOR: 1.45, 95% CI: 1.02-2.06, $p=0.04$), adjusting for other factors.
- Smokers who reported they had often noticed warning labels on their packs at baseline had 1.8 times the odds of correctly responding to five questions about the health effects of smoking that had featured on packs (AOR: 1.84, 95% CI: 1.20-2.82, $p=0.006$), but not those that had not featured on packs (AOR: 1.03, 95% CI: 0.73-1.45, $p=0.9$) when compared to smokers who did not often notice warning labels.