

Stress not a barrier to quitting the smokes

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Stress may not be a major long-term obstacle to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people quitting smoking, as previously believed, according to new research released by Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) today.

The study found that more smokers who reported being stressed at baseline made quit attempts and stayed quit for longer in the next year, contrary to past research that mainly reported smokers' perceptions that stress caused them to go back to smoking.

Forming part of the national *Talking About The Smokes* study led by Menzies in partnership with Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services, the 759 study participants completed baseline surveys and follow-up surveys a year later.

Many health professionals and smokers believe that smoking relieves stress. But this relief may be merely because smoking a cigarette relieves the recurring symptoms of nicotine withdrawal caused by the time elapsed since their previous cigarette.

Study leader, Menzies' Professor David Thomas says health staff can emphasise the research evidence of the benefits to stress management, mental health and well-being that come with successfully quitting smoking.

"Being more stressed or depressed could be seen as a reason to advise a smoker to quit rather than to put it off," Prof Thomas said.

"This is very important in these stressful times, and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who experience more stressful events.

"Quitting smoking is always a good first step in improving your health and can increase your confidence to take on bigger problems."

Just under two in five (37 per cent) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 and over smoke daily, down from 45 per cent in 2008.

The study was conducted in partnership with the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, its affiliates, 34 Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services and Torres Shire Council.

The study was funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and published in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* and available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1753-6405.12993> (HTML) or <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/1753-6405.12993> (PDF).

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/

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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 759 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander smokers completed surveys at baseline (April 2012-October 2013) and follow-up (August 2013-August 2014)
- We created a five-point stress score by answers to two questions: 'How often have felt in control of the important thing sin your life?' and 'How often have you felt you had so many worries that you could not deal with them?'
- Baseline smokers with a one point higher stress score had 1.3 times the odds of making a quit attempt between baseline and follow-up.
- Among those who had made a quit attempt between baseline and follow-up, smokers with a one point higher stress score had 1.4 times the odds of sustaining a quit attempt for a month or more.