

Just the Facts:

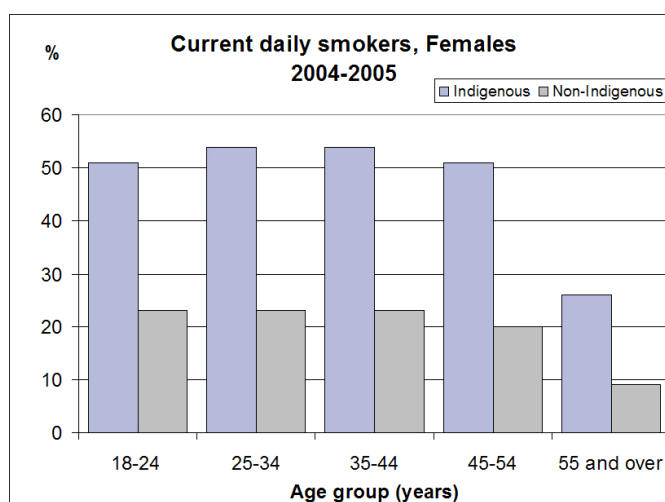
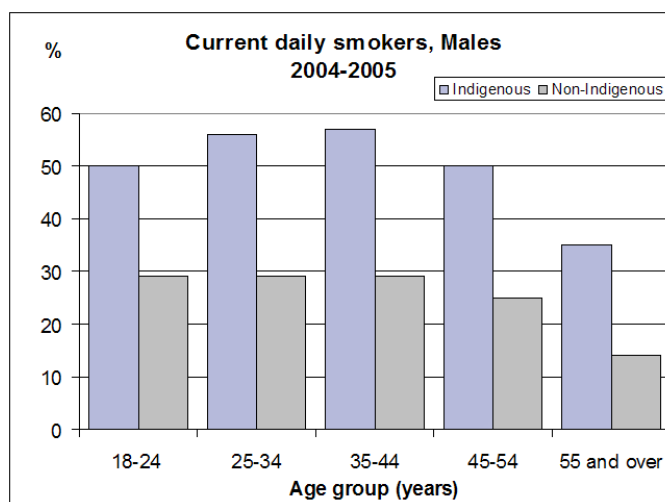
A fact sheet about tobacco use among Indigenous Australians

Indigenous smoking rates

- ◆ Generally smoking rates for Australia have declined over recent years from 34% in 1980¹ to 16.6% in 2007.²
- ◆ In 2008 nearly half (47%) of Indigenous Australians over the age of 15 smoke cigarettes daily.³ This means that Indigenous people are almost three times more likely to smoke than other Australians.
- ◆ After many years of no change in smoking prevalence rates we are beginning to see a slight drop in the number of Indigenous people who smoke. Between 2002 and 2008 smoking rates for Indigenous people aged 15 years and over have dropped from 51% to 47%.³
- ◆ In 2008, Indigenous people who lived in remote areas were more likely to be current smokers (53%) than those living in major cities (42%).³
- ◆ Smoking rates are higher in the younger age groups and lower in the over 55 age group for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations; however Indigenous smoking rates are at least twice that of non-Indigenous rates for both men and women across all age groups.⁴
- ◆ Indigenous Australians make fewer quitting attempts and are less successful in quitting than other Australian smokers.^{5,6}
- ◆ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, on average, smoked more cigarettes per

week than other Australians; 115 versus 97.²

- ◆ Most Indigenous households are smoking households. In 2004-2005, 62% of households with Indigenous residents had at least one regular smoker.⁷



Source: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey, 2004-05⁴

More Indigenous people start smoking at an early age

- ◆ By the age of 13, one in ten (10%) Indigenous current daily smokers or ex-smokers began to smoke regularly and more than two thirds (68%) by the age of 18 years.⁷
- ◆ In comparison, in 2004-05, one in twenty (5%) of non-Indigenous current daily smokers or ex-smokers smoked regularly by the age of 13 and 54% by the age of 18.⁷

More Indigenous women smoke while pregnant

- ◆ Smoking during pregnancy is a major risk factor leading to low birth weight, premature birth, still birth, infant mortality, immune system problems, sickness in infancy, impaired growth and sudden infant death syndrome.⁸
- ◆ Babies of mothers who have smoked during pregnancy are also more likely to have adverse long-term outcomes such as poorer academic performance and impaired final height.⁸
- ◆ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women were three times more likely to smoke

during pregnancy than non Indigenous women (50% compared to 15%).⁸

- ◆ More Indigenous women smoke heavily (more than 20 cigarettes per day) than non Indigenous women during pregnancy.⁸

Many health workers smoke

- ◆ Research has found that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers smoke at similarly high rates as other Indigenous Australians and of those, many are heavy smokers.⁸
- ◆ Health workers use smoking as a way of coping with their often stressful jobs.⁸



- ◆ In 2006, the number of Indigenous people was estimated to be 517,200 or 2.5% of the total population in Australia.⁹
- ◆ **Indigenous Australians die at a younger age compared to non-Indigenous Australians.** On average, Indigenous men only live to 67.2 years of age compared to 78.7 years for non-Indigenous men. Similarly, on average Indigenous women live to the age of 72.9 years compared to 82.6 years for non-Indigenous women.¹⁰

Indigenous Australian smokers and their health

- ◆ Smoking related illness accounts for 20% of all Indigenous adult deaths.¹¹
- ◆ Smoking is responsible for more Indigenous ill health and deaths than alcohol and all other illicit drugs combined.¹¹
- ◆ Indigenous people experience much higher levels of illness and early death than non-Indigenous Australians. Smoking is responsible for 17% of this health gap.¹¹
- ◆ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are current daily smokers or ex-smokers were more likely to report being in fair or poor health than those who have never smoked (27% compared with 17%).⁷
- ◆ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have never smoked were more likely to report being in excellent or very good health (47%) than current daily smokers (35%) or ex-smokers (41%).⁷
- ◆ Over half of Indigenous regular smokers (55%) living in non-remote areas reported that they did less than 100 minutes of exercise per week compared to 42% of those who did not smoke.⁷
- ◆ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who smoked regularly were more than twice as likely as ex-smokers and those who had never smoked

to consume risky/high levels of alcohol.⁷

- ◆ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in non-remote areas who smoked regularly were also twice as likely as non-smokers to report using illicit drugs.⁷
- ◆ Marijuana use was much higher among Indigenous smokers compared to non-smokers in non-remote areas (46% of 18-34 year old smokers compared with 16% of non smokers).⁷



Tobacco smoking increases the risk of many diseases including:

- ◆ cardiovascular disease — heart attack, stroke, high blood pressure and peripheral vascular disease (diseases of blood vessels excluding the heart and brain);
- ◆ a range of cancers — mouth, lip and throat, stomach, liver, pancreas, kidney, bladder and cervical; and
- ◆ respiratory system diseases — chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (blocked airways making breathing difficult), such as emphysema and chronic bronchitis

Indigenous people are also more likely to die of a smoking related illness than other Australians

- ◆ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples die of heart, stroke and vascular diseases (that affect the heart and blood vessels) at nearly three times the rate of the non-Indigenous population.¹²
- ◆ Indigenous Australians are nearly four times more likely to die from diseases of the respiratory system (diseases of the lungs) as non-Indigenous Australians.¹²
- ◆ Between the ages of 35 and 64 years Indigenous people die of cancers including smoking related cancers at twice the rate of other Australians.¹³

Non-smokers are at risk because of Environmental Tobacco Smoke (ETS)

Because smoking rates are so high, many Indigenous non-smokers are exposed to ETS (also called passive smoking) and as a consequence have an increased risk of developing lung cancer and other smoking related illnesses.

- ◆ More than half (62%) of households with an Indigenous resident had one or more smokers and nearly half (45%) of these households had a resident that smoked indoors.⁷
- ◆ Two out of three (66%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children lived in a house with one or more regular

smokers and more than one in four (28%) shared a house with one or more residents who smoked indoors.⁷



Why do Indigenous people smoke?

While smoking rates for Indigenous Australians are very high compared to other Australians it is important to understand the historical context and complexity which surrounds this fact. Below are listed just a few of the 'facts' which impact on Indigenous Australian's use and dependence on tobacco:

- ◆ Modern tobacco was introduced to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people after colonisation, although some communities chewed native shrubs containing nicotine. These 'bush tobaccos' however were used sparingly and often associated with sacred ritual significance.¹⁴
- ◆ Modern tobacco was used by early European settlers as a means of bargaining and trade with Australia's Indigenous peoples. In the decades that followed and as Indigenous people were displaced onto

church, government or private missions, tobacco was an important part of rations provided in exchange for work and to reward cooperation.¹⁵

- ◆ There is a strong link between whether a person smokes and their socio-economic status. In general, research has shown that people who have attained lower levels of education, income, employment and housing (whether they are renting versus owning their home), are more likely to smoke.² Indigenous people's over representation in all of these disadvantaging factors is likely to be an important contributor towards the community's high prevalence rates.
- ◆ Smoking has become 'normalised' in many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. While smoking is not a 'cultural practice' as such, it has become a part of most Indigenous peoples daily experience given that nearly half of adults currently smoke. Whether they themselves

smoke or whether their friends and family smoke, smoking surrounds most Indigenous people and has become ingrained into many aspects of everyday life. Additionally, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have a strong tradition of sharing resources and the sharing of cigarettes reinforces smoking. As a result quitting in this environment is also challenging.¹⁶

- ◆ A study has shown that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people would like to quit if they could with more than half having made at least one attempt to quit in the previous year.¹⁷
- ◆ Smoking is highly addictive and quitting is hard, particularly given that Indigenous people often feel overwhelmed by other negative factors in their lives and quitting is one more problem which they need to struggle with.¹⁶
- ◆ Smoking and stress – Many Indigenous Australians experience high levels of stress due to a combination of negative psychological factors (e.g. grief, sense of belonging), socio-economic factors (e.g. education, unemployment) and social dysfunctions (e.g. family violence, incarceration etc). Many Indigenous people use smoking as a coping mechanism when faced with these problems and quitting in this environment is extra challenging.¹⁷



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Centre for Excellence in Indigenous Tobacco Control

Level 4, 207 Bouverie Street,
The University of Melbourne, VIC 3010, Australia
P: +61 3 0833 0870
F: +61 3 8344 0824
E: ceitc-info@unimelb.edu.au
W: www.ceitc.edu.au

