

# Just the Facts:

## A fact sheet about tobacco use among Indigenous Australians

### Key Facts

- ◆ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples represent around 2.5 per cent of the total population in Australia (ABS 2001).
- ◆ Generally smoking rates for Australia have declined over recent years, however smoking rates among Australia's Indigenous population have not changed for more than 10 years (Ivers 2002; ABS 2004).
- ◆ Half of Indigenous Australians over the age of 15 smoke cigarettes daily. By comparison one in 6 of the general population smoke. This means that Indigenous people are more than 2 times more likely to smoke than other Australians (AIHW 2008).
- ◆ Indigenous Australians make fewer quitting attempts and are less successful in quitting than other Australian smokers (Ivers 2002; AIHW 2004).
- ◆ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples die at a younger age compared to non-Indigenous Australians (ABS 2002). On average, Indigenous men only live to 56 years of age compared to 77 years for non-Indigenous men (AIHW 2004). Similarly, on average Indigenous women live to the age of 63 compared to 83 years of age for non-Indigenous women (ABS 2002).
- ◆ Smoking is a major cause of heart disease, stroke, several different forms of cancer, and a wide variety of other health problems.
- ◆ 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 (AIHW 2004).
- ◆ Indigenous Australians are nearly four times more likely to die from diseases of the respiratory system (diseases of the lungs) as non-Indigenous Australians (AIHW 2004).
- ◆ Tobacco smoking rates vary across States and Territories. Victoria has the highest percentage of Indigenous smokers and Tasmania the lowest (ABS 2004).



## Indigenous persons aged 15 years or over: Australia, 2002

### Smoker Status

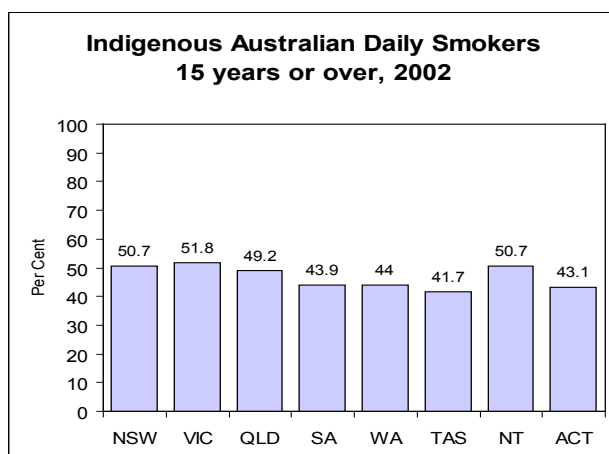
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|----------------------|---------|
| Current daily smoker | 48.6%   |
| Occasional smoker    | 2.3%    |
| Ex-smoker            | 15.3%   |
| Never smoked         | 33.2%   |
| Total                | 100.0%  |
| Total Population     | 282,200 |

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2004, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2002, cat. no. 4714.0, ABS, Canberra

## Indigenous and non-Indigenous smokers

- ◆ Chart 2 shows that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples smoke tobacco at significantly higher rates across all age groups compared to non-Indigenous Australians.

Chart 2



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2004, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2002, cat. no. 4714.0, ABS, Canberra

- ◆ Indigenous people are more likely to start smoking at a younger age than non-Indigenous people (CEITC 2008).
- ◆ Indigenous Australians' smoking rates peak between the ages of 35 and 44 years, an age at which other Australians tend to give up.
- ◆ Although the proportion of Indigenous Australian smoker begins to decline over the age of 44 years, the rates still remain much higher than for non-Indigenous smokers.
- ◆ In addition to high smoking rates, Indigenous Australians also smoke, on average, more cigarettes per week than other Australian smokers (AIHW 2008).
  - ◇ Indigenous Australians: 125 cigarettes/week
  - ◇ Non-Indigenous Australians: 108 cigarettes/week
- ◆ Smoking rates for Indigenous students are consistently higher than for non-Indigenous students (see Chart 3) (Centre for Behavioural Research in Cancer 2005).
- ◆ Pregnant Indigenous women's smoking rates are at least as high as the Indigenous population generally (CEITC 2008).
- ◆ Two out of three Indigenous

children live in a household with at least one regular smoker and one in four children live in a household in which at least one resident regularly smokes indoors (AIHW 2007).

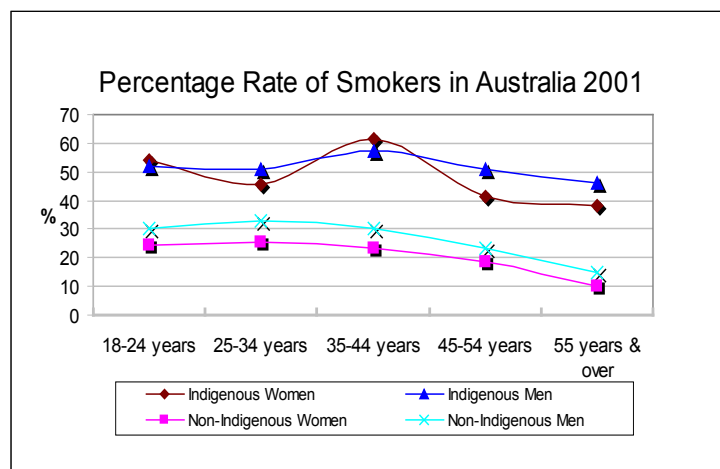
## Indigenous Australian Smokers and Health

- ◆ Smoking contributes to, and is the most preventable cause of, poor health and early death among Indigenous Australians (ABS 2002).
- ◆ Tobacco use was responsible for one in five of all Indigenous deaths and is the largest contributing factor to the burden of disease for Indigenous males and the second for Indigenous females (Vos, Barker et al. 2007).
- ◆ 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;

- ◇ respiratory system diseases — chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (blocked airways making breathing difficult), such as emphysema and chronic bronchitis; and
- ◇ low birth weight and sudden infant death syndrome in babies whose mothers have smoked during pregnancy.

- ◆ Two out of every three deaths within the Indigenous population before the age of 65 years can be attributed to heart, stroke and vascular diseases (AIHW 2004). In comparison, the rates are one in 10 for the non-Indigenous population (AIHW 2004).

Chart 3



Source: Centre for Behavioural Research in Cancer, 2005 (unpublished data), Australian School Students Alcohol and Drug Surveys: 1996-2002, The Cancer Council Victoria, Melbourne

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