

**EMBARGOED 00.01 Wednesday, 15 December 2021**

## **Cancer Council warns that the government's goals for smoking prevalence will only be possible with ongoing funding to tackle Indigenous smoking**

*Cancer Council welcomes the findings from the report released today by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) that shows a decline in smoking prevalence among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.*

Cancer Council welcomes the Australian Government's recent commitment to reducing smoking rates but warns that achieving the government's targets requires ongoing and long-term financial support for community-led programs that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians to avoid and quit tobacco.

With a federal election looming, Cancer Council is calling on all political parties to commit to substantial, long-term funding of culturally appropriate programs and activities including the Tackling Indigenous Smoking program.

The *Alcohol, tobacco & other drugs in Australia* report outlines a decrease in smoking rates amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities of one fifth (20%) since 1994.

Dr Raglan Maddox leads the evaluation of the Tackling Indigenous Smoking program at the Australian National University and noted that while we're making strides in the right direction, work needs to be done to ensure that smoking rates continue to decline and to prevent future generations from taking up smoking.

Dr Maddox said, "It is pleasing to know that the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults who smoke daily has dropped by almost 50,000 since the mid-2000s.

"More needs to be done to see continued success. We know that forty three percent (43%) of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population smoke, and it is responsible for over a third (37%) of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths and 50% of deaths among those aged 45 years and older.

"The Tackling Indigenous Smoking program is designed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and utilises culturally appropriate activities to reduce the burden of smoking related health issues."

Megan Varlow, Director of Cancer Control Policy at Cancer Council Australia, said "The Tackling Indigenous Smoking initiative is recognised as one of Australia's most encouraging tobacco control initiatives and with continued funding will continue to achieve declines in smoking prevalence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. "

To learn more about Cancer Council's call for continued investment in culturally appropriate activities and programs, visit [www.cancer.org.au](http://www.cancer.org.au).

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