

**Media Release**

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**CANCER COUNCIL ENCOURAGES AUSTRALIANS TO QUIT FOR COVID**

*Research shows smokers more likely to have severe COVID-19 symptoms*

Cancer Council Australia has joined the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee in encouraging Australians to quit smoking to reduce their risk of COVID-19 complications.

The calls come on the eve of World No Tobacco Day (Sunday May 31) as growing evidence shows smokers may be at higher risk of severe complications from COVID-19.

Dr Sarah White, director of Quit and smoking cessation advisor to Cancer Council Australia, explained why now, more than ever, smokers should use COVID-19 as motivation to quit.

“Research on COVID-19 is still emerging however, in the UK, analysis of data from two million users of a symptom tracker app suggested a 26 per cent increase in development of COVID-19 symptoms in current smokers.

“With smoking already increasing the risk of 16 different types of cancer, cardiovascular disease including stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and diabetes this emerging research should be extra motivation for people to quit smoking.

“Smoking increases inflammation in the lungs and damages the lungs so that they simply don’t work as well. While there is insufficient evidence to identify a relationship between e-cigarette use and worsened COVID-19 outcomes, major clinical trials of e-cigarette use have demonstrated a higher number of severe respiratory infections in patients who use e-cigarettes, which could point to potential harmful impacts for people who contract COVID-19

“Smoking also compromises the immune system, which means the body has more trouble fighting the COVID-19 infection and it increases the risk of developing a secondary infection in the lung.

“Quitting smoking can be hard, but support is available, and it has the potential to be life-changing. Speak to your GP or call the Quitline, which has been proven to help people stop smoking,” Dr White said.

Tobacco excise, hard-hitting mass media campaigns and advertising restrictions have combined to halve smoking rates in Australia over the past 25 years. These policy measures have been made more effective by quit support measures.”

Cancer Council is also encouraging health professionals to talk to their patients about the risks of COVID-19 for smokers and advise them to quit. The Ask-Advise-Help model can be useful - *Ask* all patients if they smoke, *Advise* smokers to quit, and provide them with *Help* to quit by making a referral to Quitline and providing stop smoking medications.

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