



**Media Release**  
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## **Heart Foundation and Cancer Council call for action on World No Tobacco Day**

*No.1 cause of life expectancy gap 'a threat to Indigenous development'*

Tobacco is the number one preventable cause of the life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, highlighting the need for strong action, Cancer Council Australia and the National Heart Foundation said today.

Speaking on World No Tobacco Day (31 May), Cancer Council Australia CEO, Professor Sanchia Aranda, and National Heart Foundation tobacco control spokesperson, Mr Maurice Swanson, said Indigenous Australians were three times more likely to die of preventable causes as non-Indigenous Australians, with smoking the number one reason for the disparity.

World No Tobacco Day is observed worldwide each year to highlight the harms of tobacco and unify nations to take action. Professor Aranda said that as this year's theme was 'Tobacco – a threat to development', it was fitting to highlight the fact that tobacco remained a serious threat to the development of Australia's Indigenous population.

"Australia is a relatively wealthy country and a leader in tobacco control. The developing world bears most of the disease burden from tobacco and is increasingly exploited by the tobacco industry," Professor Aranda said.

"However, the smoking rates and health outcomes in many Indigenous communities are comparable to some of the world's poorest nations. Currently 39 per cent of Indigenous Australians smoke compared with 12.8 per cent of the general Australian population. In remote communities, this rises to 60 per cent.

"It's no coincidence that preventable death rates among Indigenous Australians are three times those of the general population – just as smoking rates are. In fact 20 percent of deaths in the Indigenous population are caused by smoking.

"Health disparities in Indigenous populations also relate to many other conditions associated with disadvantage. But if we could break the cycle of smoking, poor health and early death, we could make the greatest difference in closing the gap on life expectancy – and deliver additional benefits to health and wellbeing."

Mr Swanson said successive Australian governments had been addressing the issue, but more needed to be done in recognition of the relationship between smoking and the life expectancy gap.

"We have seen some improvements in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island smoking rates, which have dropped from almost 49 per cent in 2002 to just under 39 per cent today.

"The Tackling Indigenous Smoking Programme and its 'Don't Make Smokes your Story' campaigns are excellent government investments, but we need to do more to reach people in remote communities.

"We also need more funding for public education campaigns for the general community, which have been shown to benefit Indigenous people in particular.

"For the general population, smoking is still the leading cause of preventable disease and death in Australia.

"World No Tobacco Day is a timely reminder that while Australia has come a long way when it comes to tobacco control – there is still so much more we can do, particularly for our Indigenous population."

**ENDS**

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