



## Media Release

For immediate release: 7 October 2009

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# Aboriginal communities in desperate need of quit smoking support

Remote Aboriginal communities lack understanding of how to quit smoking and are unable to fully access the support they need to kick the habit, researchers from James Cook University said today (7 October) at the Oceania Tobacco Control Conference in Darwin.

Research suggests that 40 per cent of smokers in some Aboriginal communities are unaware of quit aids, such as nicotine replacement therapy (NRT), with Aboriginal people facing an uphill battle to quit.

Aboriginal smoking rates have remained stable in recent decades at around 50 per cent, with rates in remote Aboriginal communities typically higher, compared to 17 per cent across the general population

Following a survey across three remote communities in Arnhem Land researcher, Jan Robertson, explained that not only do these communities lack knowledge on how to successfully quit, they have limited access to quit smoking aids, with low dose patches often the only NRT product readily available.

“Our research shows that around 60 per cent of smokers in these settings are classified as having a high rate of tobacco dependency – smoking first thing in the morning or even waking during the night to smoke,” Ms Robertson said.

“For those who wish to use smoking cessation medication, patches alone may not be adequate considering the dependency levels of the majority of these smokers. It is important remote community members have access to similar choices available to the rest of the Australian population.”

The research indicates that while smoking rates within remote Aboriginal communities are sitting at around 76 per cent, 60 per cent of smokers are considering quitting.

“We know that the majority of smokers want to quit and 48 per cent actually say they have attempted to quit in the past. With only 14 per cent of people ever having used an aid such as NRT, it is apparent that there is a lack of sufficient knowledge and support to successfully quit,” Ms Robertson said.

“Resources are extremely limited to provide advice and support to help these smokers quit. Tobacco isn’t always perceived by community members to be a high priority when they are dealing with a wide range of health issues – it is the silent killer.”

Ms Robertson and her team examined the receptiveness of Aboriginal smokers to quit smoking aids and found a readiness to use NRT gum, which is not currently available in all remote Aboriginal communities.

“The Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC) listed NRT patches only on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme in 2008 and not NRT gum, suggesting the Indigenous population avoided oral aids for smoking cessation”, Ms Robertson said.

“Early results from our research suggest that people in the communities we are working with are willing to use NRT gum alone or in combination with patches.”

Cancer Council Australia Chief Executive Officer, Professor Ian Olver, said it was important that Aboriginal people were provided with as much support as possible to successfully quit.

“With more than 50 per cent of smokers in aboriginal communities indicating they want to quit, we are half way there,” he said

“It is imperative that aboriginal communities are not disadvantaged to quit and I urge the PBAC to reconsider the pharmacotherapies available to these communities.”

[Jan Robertson will present her research at 2.45pm today at the Oceania Tobacco Control Conference. Waterfront room 2, Darwin Convention Centre, Northern Territory.](#)

**Notes to editors:**

Ms Robertson and her team surveyed three remote Aboriginal communities in Arnhem Land. Key indications of the research were:

- smoking rates within Aboriginal communities are around 76 per cent
- 60 per cent of smokers are considering quitting
- 48 per cent of smokers had previously attempted to quit
- 40 per cent had no knowledge of pharmacotherapies.
- only 14 per cent had ever used pharmacotherapies

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