
Lung cancer in women on rise, while male rates decline

More girls smoking than boys adds urgency to passage of plain packaging bills

New research showing increased lung cancer rates in Australian women adds urgency to the need to further de-glamourise tobacco smoking, Cancer Council Australia said today. The research should add urgency to the federal Parliament's passage of plain packaging for tobacco bills.

Cancer Council Australia CEO, Professor Ian Olver, said a net increase in lung cancer incidence in Australian women compared with men could be attributed to chronological differences in smoking behaviour between the sexes.

"Smoking prevalence in Australian men peaked in the 1940s while in women it was the mid-70s, so it's not surprising lung cancer rates in men are declining while they are on the rise in women," Professor Olver said.

"In the 1940s tobacco products were heavily promoted to men, while in the 1960s and '70s the tobacco companies sought to exploit the female market with brand names like "Slims", menthol cigarettes and packaging stylised to appeal to women.

"If you look at a number of cigarette brands targeting women today, you can see how much effort the tobacco companies put into making the pack a sleek, stylish fashion accessory.

"The rate of smoking among Australian teenagers aged 14 to 17 is higher for girls than boys, so it's important we remove the glamour that some young women associate with smoking. Federal Parliament has an ideal opportunity to do that now by passing the plain packaging for tobacco bills."

Professor Olver said the new research showed differences in relative rates of lung cancer in Australian men and women. While the trends were alarming, it was important to see the data in the context of other key facts, including:

Overall lung cancer incidence and mortality was still higher in Australian men than in women, due largely to higher historical rates of male smoking;

- Apart from the 14-17 year-old age group, smoking was still more prevalent in Australian males than in females;
- At least 30% of lung cancer cases in women were not linked to smoking, along with around 10% in men;
- As well as supporting policies that reduce smoking, it is vitally important to invest more in lung cancer detection and treatment.

"At a time when we've rightly been raising awareness of breast cancer and celebrating improvements in patient outcomes, it is important to remember that lung cancer claims the lives of more Australian women than any other cancer type, including breast cancer," Professor Olver said.

"Every cancer death is a tragedy and we need to do all we can to advance the prevention, detection and treatment of lung cancer in Australia."



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Read more in the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's report [Lung cancer in Australia in 2011: an overview.](#)