

Media Release

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Cancer Council cautiously welcomes new Australian Bureau of Statistics data showing record low percentages of Australian smoking

Cancer Council has cautiously welcomed new Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data showing adult smoking rates in the time of COVID-19 at an all-time low of 10.7% of the total Australian adult population.

Chair of Cancer Council's Public Health Committee, Anita Dessaix, said the new data was encouraging, while noting that the ABS advised caution on the results, described as "experimental" due to a new approach involving compilation from multiple surveys. COVID-19 would also have had effects on population behaviour and data collection.

Ms Dessaix said Cancer Council welcomed any indication that smoking rates were declining, while being careful not to make assumptions on longer-term trends in view of the ABS advice.

"This is substantially lower than the 2018 figure ABS of 13.8% adult smoking rates, with the ABS noting that there was a larger-than-usual margin of error and emphasising it was an insight into health behaviours during a once-in-a-century pandemic," she said.

"It is nonetheless encouraging, and we will await with great interest what the trends look like as Australia comes out of COVID-19.

"Long-term smokers have a two-in-three chance of premature death compared with the rest of the population, and smoking causes around one in five cancer deaths, so any smoking at all has a highly damaging impact on the nation's health.

"We commended the recent announcement from Minister for Health, Greg Hunt, of an aspirational target of 5% adult smoking rates by 2030. Evidence shows that the key to further reducing smoking prevalence will be doing more of what has worked to drive smoking rates down over the past two decades.

"This includes protecting younger generations from smoking uptake, which has been the largest driver of prevalence decline, and initiatives to remind smokers of the health harms and motivate them to quit."

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