

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **388 billion reasons to get anti-smoking campaigns back on the public agenda**

*New study shows ‘tobacco is the new tobacco’*

A new study estimating that smoking causes \$388 billion in long-term productivity losses in Australia should be a wake-up call to get anti-smoking mass media campaigns back on the public agenda, Cancer Council Australia said today.

The study, recently published in the [British Medical Journal’s tobacco control supplement](#), based its estimates on the loss of productivity attributed to the health harms of smoking in Australians aged 20 to 69, averaged out over their life course. It used an innovative formula which calculated losses to Australia’s economy through premature death, illness, disability and absenteeism, based on comparisons between smokers and non-smokers.

Chair of Cancer Council Australia’s Tobacco Issues Committee, Paul Grogan, said the study was an urgent wake-up call to invest more in tobacco control and should dispel the myth that smoking is good for the economy.

“The greatest burden of smoking is the loss of life, with two in three long-term smokers in Australia dying prematurely because they smoked,” Mr Grogan said.

“Unfortunately, because of the revenue associated with tobacco tax, there is also a perception that smoking somehow makes economic sense. This study should help dispel that myth and add economic urgency to the need to do more to reduce the terrible social and individual cost of smoking in Australia.”

Mr Grogan said the study also backed up well-established research that tobacco tax was an effective measure to drive down smoking rates in Australia.

“It’s also a timely opportunity to highlight how the country has dropped the ball in recent years on mass media antismoking campaigns,” he said. “People who remember the highly effective mass media campaigns over the last 20 years, might wonder where they’ve gone in recent years. The only barriers to their revival are economic – governments look for reasons not to fund these campaigns because of the cost. Yet they return huge savings directly back to the taxpayer. This new study suggests the economic benefits would be even greater than we thought.”

Mr Grogan said the reluctance to adequately fund antismoking measures also reflected the public discourse, which was rife with things described as “the new tobacco”.

“Let’s be clear: tobacco is the new tobacco. It is still a substantially bigger preventable risk factor for all diseases in Australia than anything else and is around five times more likely to cause cancer death than any other preventable risk factor.

“The latest Australian Institute of Health and Welfare data shows that while the increasing cost of tobacco products is the leading motivator to quit, knowledge of the health harms of smoking is decreasing as a quit factor. We owe it to smokers to put more tobacco tax

revenue into campaigns to remind them of the risks they're taking. And in light of this new research, we owe it to everyone who contributes to the Australian economy."

For quitting advice, Australian's can visit [quit.org.au](http://quit.org.au) or call the Quitline on 13 7848.

**ENDS**

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