



## **Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia**

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# ACOSH

Australian Council on Smoking and Health

## **25 MARCH 2009 JOINT ACOSH / AHCWA MEDIA RELEASE New Tobacco Bill will help to 'Close the Gap'**

**Western Australian Parliamentarians will make a major contribution to reducing the Aboriginal life expectancy gap by supporting the Tobacco Products Control Amendment Bill 2008.**

**Aboriginal Health Council of WA (AHCWA) CEO Darryl Kickett said that there had never been a better opportunity in Western Australia to make such an impact on Aboriginal health than right now in supporting this Bill.**

Mr Kickett explained that passing the Bill would enhance smoking initiatives currently underway in WA that were being discussed at the AHCWA's State Conference today.

AHCWA has joined the Australian Council of Smoking and Health (ACOSH) in urging State Government MPs to back the Bill, which was tabled in Parliament in November 2008. This would bring WA into line with Australian best practice.

"The number of Aboriginal West Australians still smoking is significantly high compared to the mainstream population, where people have made the choice to quit," Mr Kickett said.

"This difference is due to a range of factors – but mainly that Indigenous people have generally not identified tobacco as a health issue that should be given priority. This needs to be addressed with about half the national Aboriginal population being current smokers. In some communities, the statistics reaches a massive 80 per cent."

ACOSH Executive Director Stephen Hall said smoking caused around 20 per cent of all Indigenous deaths and recent research shows that about one in 10 Indigenous adults who were current daily smokers or ex-smokers had begun smoking regularly before the age of 13 years. More than two-thirds (68%) had begun smoking regularly before the legal age of 18 years.

"Smoking is a major health burden on individuals, families, and communities. The reality is that 50% of Aboriginal people are regular smokers and research demonstrates that one in two long term smokers will die prematurely as a consequence of their smoking," Mr Hall said.

"The maths are simple; of the national Aboriginal population of 500,000, one quarter – or 125,000 – will die early as a direct result of their smoking. The statistics have remained alarmingly high for a number of years, while smoking among Maori people in New Zealand appears to have declined 20 per cent in the last four years. We need a much more focussed effort and supporting this Bill is a terrific place to start.

"The Prime Minister is on record as saying tackling smoking is critical to closing the gap in Indigenous life expectancy. It's time we got serious about this issue in Western Australia."

The Bill seeks to protect the health of the public, and especially children, by prohibiting smoking in cars carrying children, lacing all tobacco products out of sight at point-of-sale and making al fresco eating areas, children's playgrounds, patrolled beaches and sports grounds smokefree.

**ENDS**

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