



MEDIA RELEASE

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Latest Youth Smoking Survey: Some Good, Some Bad News

The latest Cancer Council Tasmania survey of youth smoking rates released today contains both good and bad news about school students' smoking behaviour.

Cancer Council CEO, Lawson Ride, says while smoking rates in the younger age groups (12-15) have dropped significantly, there are worrying patterns in the female 16-17 age group with current smokers dramatically increasing their average number of cigarettes smoked from 29 per week in 1999 to 42 per week in 2002.

“Whilst it's encouraging to see that there have been falls in the level of young Tasmanians smoking, the evidence that young women are becoming much heavier smokers is a significant concern and has major health implications.”

“17% of Tasmanian adolescents are current smokers - that is they smoked within one week of the survey period. That means around 6,300 young Tasmanians aged 12-17 years old are smoking 213,500 cigarettes every week.

This is unacceptably high illegal usage of a deadly product and it should be ringing alarm bells for government, parents and the broader community.”

The Australian Secondary Students Alcohol & Drug Survey (ASSAD) Report is the latest in a three yearly series which has charted the fight against teen smoking in Australia since 1984.

“We were encouraged to find that smoking rates amongst male school students in the 12-15 year category were the lowest since surveys were first conducted almost twenty years ago.

“For young girls in the same age group, smoking rates were at their lowest levels since 1990.

“At the same time the average number of cigarettes smoked by current smokers in the 16-17 year age group has increased significantly for both sexes since 1999, jumping from 29 cigarettes a week in 1999 to 39 in 2002.

The figures released today are based on surveys conducted with over 1,790 students aged 12-17 in 28 Government, Catholic and Independent schools across the state.

The Survey report details the smoking habits of students aged from 12-17 years, showing the number of students who have ever smoked at all, as well as the proportion of students who are classified as ‘current’ smokers (have smoked in the last week).

Survey Report Key Findings include:

- The proportion of boy and girls aged 12 to 15 years who smoked cigarettes during the 12 months and four weeks prior to the Survey declined significantly between 1999 and 2002.
- The percentage of 16-17 year old boys who reported having smoked during the past week (current smokers) fell from 30% in 1999 to 19% in 2002.
- The average number of cigarettes consumed by 16-17-year-old girls increased significantly from 1999 to 2002. In 1999, female ‘current smokers’ consumed an average of 29 cigarettes during the week prior to the survey, while in 2002, this increased to 42 cigarettes.
- The comparisons in smoking behaviours between 1984 and 2002 clearly show that the proportion of students who smoked during the 12 months, four weeks, and seven days prior to the survey decreased significantly from 1984 to 2002.
- The proportion of male ‘current smokers’ significantly declined from the peaked levels in 1993 (33%) to the smallest prevalence estimate in 2002 (19%).

Mr Ride said the fall in the number of students smoking in the last three years could possibly be linked to environmental changes since the last survey.

“Between 1999 and 2002, we have seen a range of legislative changes, as well as a sustained state based campaign to encourage adult smokers to quit.”

“From international experience we know that greater national investment in anti tobacco advertising would drive down smoking and uptake rates and prevent many of

the teenage smokers who are today's report statistics, from becoming the premature death statistics of 2040.

"Legislative changes including the introduction of smokefree dining and tougher penalties for retailers who sell cigarettes to children have come into effect in the last three years. "

"These types of legislative measures are very important, as they change "the norm", make smoking less desirable and make it harder for children to access cigarettes. Earlier measures like the ban on advertising in shops have also reduced the visibility of cigarettes in places young people frequent."

"A complete ban on smoking in all indoor workplaces and public places would add significantly to this momentum and benefit the health of all Tasmanians - in particular our youth - by helping to change the culture of smoking that exists in our society."

Ends

TO FOLLOW: TWO PAGE SURVEY KEY FINDINGS FACT SHEET

Available for interview:

Lawson Ride, Chief Executive Officer, The Cancer Council Tasmania :

Tel: 6233 2101 or 0418 129 757.

Copies of the Survey Report: www.cancertas.org.au and click on the Health Promotion tab or contact:

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