



## **The Hon Ken Wyatt AM, MP**

**Minister for Aged Care  
Minister for Indigenous Health  
Member for Hasluck**

### **MEDIA RELEASE**

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#### **Four-Year Program to Cut Smoking and Save Lives**

Australia's first four-year Tackling Indigenous Smoking (TIS) program will provide certainty, continuity and record funding for proven local campaigns and new initiatives to save lives and reduce the devastating impacts of tobacco-related disease.

"The sickening fact is that, despite considerable progress in recent years, smoking is still responsible for around one in five preventable deaths in Aboriginal people. That is approximately 260 premature deaths each year," said Indigenous Health Minister Ken Wyatt AM.

"It also remains the leading cause of preventable disease, accounting for more than 12 per cent of the overall burden of illness in our Indigenous communities."

Minister Wyatt said the \$183.7 million Turnbull Government commitment would play a significant role towards reaching the health targets in the upcoming Closing the Gap strategy refresh.

"Beginning on 1 July, extending the TIS program from three to four years will help secure multiple local programs for the longer term, plus identify and support expansion of new approaches in priority areas," the Minister said.

The revamped TIS program will:

- Continue the successful Regional Tobacco Control grants scheme including school and community education, smoke-free homes and workplaces and quit groups
- Expand programs targeting pregnant women and remote area smokers
- Enhance the Indigenous quitline service
- Support local Indigenous leaders and cultural programs to reduce smoking
- Continue evaluation to monitor the efficiency and effectiveness of individual programs, including increased regional data collection

Minister Wyatt said the latest Australian Bureau of Statistics report on Indigenous smoking showed significant declines in overall rates, with an average 2.1 percent annual drop since targeted interventions began in 2008.

“It is particularly encouraging to see the greatest reductions have been among younger people,” the Minister said.

“The uptake of smoking in high school age children has almost halved, while the rate for 18-24 year olds has dropped from 58 per cent to 41 per cent.

“More Indigenous people are giving up smoking, too, with the quit ratio rising to 36 per cent in 2015 but rates are still far too high and it is imperative we maintain the momentum.”

Despite falling smoking rates, recent research indicates that while heart disease has already reduced, deaths from lung cancer will continue to increase for some years due to the lag effect.

“Of special concern are continuing high levels of smoking in remote communities,” Minister Wyatt said.

“The four-year funding will include targeted support for locally driven quit programs in these areas.

“Giving babies the best start in life is also crucial, so further reducing smoking among pregnant Indigenous women everywhere is also a top priority.

“This investment in the Tackling Indigenous Smoking program highlights our long-term commitment to Closing the Gap in health inequality.”

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