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**13 July 2010**

***New study busts myth: low daily cigarette consumption in remote Aboriginal communities***

A study published today in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* shows that while smoking rates are high in five remote Aboriginal communities, the daily *number* of cigarettes smoked each day is lower than the national average, including that by the lowest socio-economic groups in Australia.

Instead of getting self-reported estimates of daily cigarettes smoked, the study used bar-coded sales records of all cigarettes sold over a full year at stores in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands of South Australia. The researchers used an audit of cigarette purchases in 2007 to estimate the number of cigarettes smoked daily.

Data for sales of tobacco products in the five APY communities indicate that smokers consumed between 6 and 8 cigarettes a day. Australian smokers in the broader population smoke an average of 14 cigarettes a day, and smokers in the lowest income group smoke an average of 17 cigarettes per day.

The APY study suggests while smoking prevalence is certainly high at approximately 50%, compared to 16.6% for the general population, the low daily number of cigarettes smoked in the APY goes some way to “busting the myth” that Aboriginal people are heavy smokers.

This is the third recent study of smoking by Indigenous people which has shown lower than average daily smoking numbers in remote Aboriginal communities. The authors suggest that the growing evidence of low average daily cigarette consumption challenges assumptions about widespread nicotine addiction, and too much emphasis on subsidised nicotine replacement therapy for Aboriginal smokers.

Associate Professor David Thomas from Darwin’s Menzies School of Health Research said “More work is needed to see if these encouragingly low rates are found in more Aboriginal communities. While smoking less than 10 cigarettes a day still greatly raises health risks compared to non-smokers, it may mean that many Aboriginal smokers are not as addicted as it has been assumed. This is fundamentally important information as we consider how best to reduce smoking in these communities”

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