

New report shows Victorian smoking rates lower, but young adults and less advantaged groups remain resistant to change

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A new report looking at tobacco use in Victoria has shown that smoking rates amongst young adults (18-29 years) have failed to drop significantly over the last eight years.

Young adults were significantly more likely to be regular smokers (26.2%) than Victorians aged 50 years or more (10.5%) and tended to be more likely to smoke than those aged between 30-49 years (21.2%).

The data, from The Cancer Council Victoria, reveals regular smoking among all Victorian adults has declined significantly between 1998 and 2006.

In 2006, 18.2% of Victorians surveyed were regular smokers. The proportion of Victorians surveyed who had never smoked was 52.9% in 2006.

Professor Melanie Wakefield, from The Cancer Council Victoria, said although there has been an overall reduction in smoking prevalence since 1998, the decline was not rapid enough.

"There has been a gradual decline in smoking rates over the last eight years in Victoria, however they are not falling as swiftly as they could be."

"Given this, it may be timely to consider the benefits of greater investment in comprehensive tobacco control strategies, such as social marketing campaigns, that could help drive smoking rates lower."

Professor Wakefield said the report indicated smoking rates amongst Victorians living in areas of lowest socio-economic advantage were not declining as quickly as those living in more advantaged areas.

"While, in 2006, over one-fifth (21.8%) of respondents living in areas of highest disadvantage were smokers, smoking rates for those living in the areas with the most advantage were only 16.1%."

"Despite research demonstrating Victorian anti-smoking media campaigns encourage smokers of lower and higher SES to seek help for quitting smoking equally, the rate of decline in smoking is greater among those living in higher SES areas than those living in less advantaged areas."

Acting Director of Quit Victoria, Ms Suzie Stillman, said that more must be done to ensure Victorian smoking rates continue to fall across all demographic groups.

"Over recent years we have seen a lot of good work aimed at curbing the devastating toll of tobacco in Victoria however this data provides us with a reminder that smoking must remain a public health priority."

"In July, smoking bans will be introduced into bars and clubs offering a window of opportunity to significantly reduce smoking rates in the next twelve months."

"Research suggests that the introduction of smokefree laws in Victoria will inspire many younger smokers to quit and encourage others to smoke less."

"Bars and clubs are such popular places for younger people to smoke. There is little doubt that smoking bans will have a positive impact on the number of people quitting and on smoking behaviours in general."

"However this tremendous step forward in tobacco control must be supported by investment in quit smoking mass media campaigns if we are to make the most of this chance to see smoking rates decline," said Ms Stillman.

Key findings from 'Smoking prevalence and consumption in Victoria: key findings from the 1998-2006 population surveys' include:

- Regular smoking among Victorian adults declined significantly between 1998 and 2006, from 21.3% to 18.2%
- The proportion of those who had never smoked increased from 49.9% in 1998, to 52.9% in 2006
- In 2006 a higher percentage of males were regular smokers compared to female (20.1% and 16.4%, respectively)
- The proportion of regular smokers living in rural Victoria was not significantly different to those living in metropolitan Melbourne (18.5% regular smokers compared with 18.1%, respectively).
- Heavy smokers (25+ cigarettes a day) made up 15.7% of regular smokers in 2006; medium smokers (15-24 cigarettes a day) accounted for 29.7%, and light smokers (fewer than 15 cigarettes a day) comprised over half (54.7%) of regular smokers.
- The percentage of heavy smokers significantly declined across the years 1998 to 2006 (ranging from 27% in 1998, down to 15.7% in 2006).
- There was also a significant increase in the proportion of light smokers across this period (from 46.1% in 1998, up to 54.7% in 2006).

Professor Melanie Wakefield is available for comment

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http://www.cancervic.org.au/media/media-releases/archived_media_releases/2007_media_releases/media_releases_may_2007/smoking-rates-fall.html