

Fewer smoke now, but those who do are young

By **JULIA MEDEW**

SMOKING rates have dropped by a fifth in Victoria in the past 10 years, thanks to higher cigarette prices, bans on tobacco advertising and graphic health campaigns.

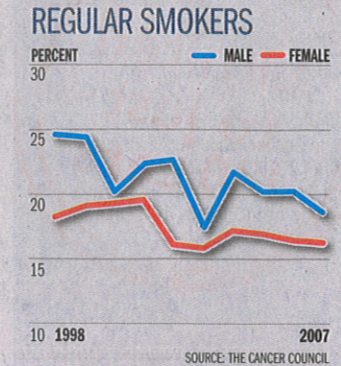
A report released by Cancer Council Victoria yesterday also showed smoking rates had fallen to an all-time low for women, from 17.5 per cent in 1998 to 14.7 per cent last year.

For men, the rate fell from 25 per cent in 1998 to 18.5 per cent last year.

Overall, the random survey of 3000 people showed that 6.5 per cent smoked regularly last year.

People aged 18 to 29 are still the most likely to smoke, with 22.3 per cent of them regularly smoking last year. The group was closely followed by those aged 30 to 49, of whom 18.8 per cent were regular smokers.

The director of the council's Centre for Behavioural Research in Cancer, Melanie Wakefield, said the trends reflected anti-



tobacco measures, including a ban on traditional tobacco advertising, higher prices, graphic warnings on packets and regular mass-media campaigns.

"A number of significant tobacco control initiatives have been implemented since 1998 and the impact of these efforts are likely to have contributed to the continued decline," Professor Wakefield said.

Quit Victoria executive director Fiona Sharkie said more work was needed to continue the downward trend.