

28 May, 2014

## Clearing the air for everyone

With World No Tobacco Day on Saturday 31 May, figures reveal that a quarter of smokers in NSW (23 per cent) are planning to quit in the next 30 days<sup>1</sup>. This means an estimated 200,000 people across NSW are making plans to quit. In South Eastern Sydney, this could be as many as 26,000 smokers wanting to quit in the next month.

Julie Dixon, Director, Planning and Population Health, South Eastern Sydney Local Health District, said World No Tobacco Day on Saturday 31 May provides a great opportunity for smokers to mark the start of their quit journey.

“Tobacco is one of the most addictive substances known to humans, and is the largest cause of preventable death and disease in our community. There are over 90,000 smokers across South Eastern Sydney Local Health District today. Half of them will die early as a direct result of their smoking,” Ms Dixon said.

“This week the South Eastern Sydney Local Health District launched its *Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Smoking and Harm from Smoking 2014-2017*. This plan builds on the District’s strong history of commitment to tobacco control to describe actions aimed at: preventing people starting to smoke, particularly young people; helping people stop smoking, and protecting people from second-hand smoke.

“The smoking rate (2013) for South Eastern Sydney is 13.8 per cent, lower than the State average of 16.4 per cent. Our Local Health District has seen a decline in smoking rates since 2002 (from 21.2 per cent) but this downward trend is slowing.

“However, some community groups have smoking rates much higher than the average and experience a greater impact from the harms of smoking. For example, smoking rates are more than double than in the wider community among Aboriginal people, and people with mental illness, drug and alcohol problems or with HIV infection.”

Ms Dixon said the latest available figures (2007) show that more than 500 people die a year in South Eastern Sydney from tobacco related illness<sup>2</sup>. In addition, the latest data (2011-12) shows that South Eastern Sydney residents have nearly 5,000 hospitalisations each year from tobacco related illness.

“With World No Tobacco Day this week, there is no better time to start your quit journey than by joining the hundreds of thousands of other smokers in Australia planning on commencing theirs. The health benefits alone can be enough incentive to kick the habit,” Ms Dixon said.

The research, commissioned by the Cancer Institute NSW, also revealed that the average number of quit attempts (5.2) has increased since 2011<sup>1</sup> and showed that feeling supported would be important for 85 per cent of smokers if they tried to quit<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> NSW Smoking & Health Survey 2013

<sup>2</sup> ABS mortality data and population estimates (SAPHaRI). Centre for Epidemiology and Evidence, NSW Ministry of Health. Accessed from Health Statistics NSW <http://www.healthstats.nsw.gov.au/>

“It is promising to see that smokers are continuing with their efforts to quit, and that they are sticking at it but it’s important not to get disheartened if you slip-up at this time. Quitting for good often takes more than one attempt and you can make every day World No Tobacco Day,” Ms Dixon said.

“Family and friends of smokers can play an essential role this World No Tobacco Day in supporting their loved ones to quit. There are also services available to smokers as they try to overcome their addiction. Quitline provides a free, confidential and individually tailored telephone service with a specially-trained Quitline Advisor, while the iCanQuit website offers a platform for members to share their hints, tips and thoughts around their own quit attempt with an online community.”

According to the Survey, the top two motivators for quitting are health or fitness (81 per cent) and cost (38 per cent)<sup>1</sup>, the latter becoming a more dominant motivator to quit for many smokers since the Federal Government’s 12.5 per cent tax increase on cigarettes came into effect in December 2013.

Quit support is available from Quitline on 13 7848 (13 QUIT) or at [www.icanquit.com.au](http://www.icanquit.com.au).