

# Indigenous Australians are not heavy smokers

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(PhysOrg.com) -- A recent study has busted the myth Indigenous Australians are heavy smokers and has indicated those living in remote communities consume fewer cigarettes a day than other smokers, even though they continue to suffer from higher rates of smoking-related diseases.

The article, published in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* on Wednesday, suggested although smoking patterns may be as widespread as 50 percent amongst the Indigenous population, their smoking frequency is low.

The research consisted of monitoring [tobacco](#) use in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands of South Australia in 2007 by auditing the bar-coded sales data for all tobacco brands stocked in five APY stores.

The study found on average, remote Indigenous adult [smokers](#) consumed between six to eight [cigarettes](#) a day compared to an average of 19 cigarettes a day by other Australian smokers, including that of the lowest socio-economic group.

Factors for this lower tobacco consumption included limited access to APY stores, which operate for only six hours on weekdays and two hours on weekends, and the fact that many live some distance from the stores.

The authors said the sharing of cigarettes amongst the community was

also common to reinforce relationships with kin and culture. The paper said it "may make it too difficult for many smokers to smoke large quantities of cigarettes, but does enable many to smoke smaller quantities."

However, Professor Simon Chapman from the School of Public Health explained that whilst low rates of smoking frequency in Indigenous communities are encouraging, smoking-related illnesses amongst them still prevail.

"If they start smoking at a very young age and do so for a long time, then this increases the likelihood of tobacco-related diseases," he said.

One in five Indigenous Australians die every year due to smoking-related illnesses. The Federal Government has recently allocated funds as part of an Australian [tobacco control](#) project, deeming high rates of [tobacco use](#) amongst Indigenous people to be the most challenging problem.

"This is a good starting point but the government should not focus on just nicotine replacement therapy as it is not the problem of access amongst remote Indigenous communities but one of cost," Professor Chapman said.

**More information:** [www.phaa.net.au/journal.php](http://www.phaa.net.au/journal.php)

Provided by University of Sydney

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