

Youth more likely to discourage than promote smoking among peers

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Young people more often discourage smoking among their peers than encourage it, new University of Otago research suggests.

Around half of 14- and 15- year old New Zealanders have carried out at least one behaviour during the past year to discourage [smoking](#), most often by telling their peers that smoking is bad for their [health](#); to stop smoking; that they do not like smoking; and that smoking is a waste of money.

By contrast, fewer than one in ten 14- and 15- year olds did something to encourage smoking among their peers, most typically by giving them a cigarette or offering to share a cigarette. The findings come from a new Otago study published in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*.

The Study used survey findings from the 2014 Youth Insights survey of 2919 Year 10 students from 142 high schools throughout New Zealand.

The study's lead researcher, Dr Louise Marsh, says the Tobacco industry often uses the argument that smoking among [young people](#) is due to peer pressure.

"Our findings suggest that there is considerable promotion of non-smoking in the opposite direction.

"This was the case even among young people who reported smoking. It

was also encouraging that Māori and Pacific young people were more likely to discourage smoking than young people from other ethnicities," Dr Marsh says.

Those students who discouraged smoking were also more likely to report exposure to anti-smoking messages from a range of sources including classes at school, smokefree events and smokefree adverts. This is positive in that it indicates the spreading of smokefree messages throughout the community might influence young peoples' desire to be "agents of change", and to spread their own smokefree messages.

US research based on the Truth campaign has shown the effectiveness of "peer-to-peer" influence in reducing [tobacco smoking](#) among young people. In New Zealand, the Health Promotion Agency's Stop Before You Start campaign has helped shape social norms around non-smoking.

"Our findings demonstrate that a lot of informal youth-to-youth health education is already happening in NZ. This could be extended to engage young [people](#) as active ambassadors of Smokefree 2025," she says.

More information: Louise Marsh et al. New Zealand adolescents' discouragement of smoking among their peers, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* (2017). [DOI: 10.1111/1753-6405.12698](#)

Provided by University of Otago

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