

Sustained reduction in petrol sniffing after low aromatic fuel rollout

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Credit: University of Queensland

The rollout of low aromatic fuel has contributed to significant and sustained reduction in petrol sniffing and associated health problems in Indigenous communities, studies have found.

Researchers from The University of Queensland and Menzies School of Health Research have evaluated prevalence and patterns of inhaling petrol since the introduction of low aromatic [fuel](#) (LAF).

UQ School of Public Health's Professor Peter d'Abbs said surveys of 15

communities that had stocked low aromatic fuel since 2005 found median rates of petrol sniffing declined 96 per cent by 2014.

"The greatest reductions were among occasional and heavy users, and in the older user groups," Professor d'Abbs said.

LAF contains lower levels of [aromatic hydrocarbons](#) than regular unleaded petrol, so that sniffing will not lead to intoxication.

Government-subsidized LAF was introduced 12 years ago as a deterrent to petrol-sniffing in Indigenous communities, particularly in remote areas.

Professor d'Abbs said petrol sniffing was associated with serious medical conditions including 'sudden sniffing death' from ventricular arrhythmia, and death from asphyxiation.

"It can lead to a range of neurological and cognitive impairments, as well as damage to the kidneys, liver, heart and lungs," he said.

"There is also a broader impact on families and communities, through violence and vandalism by intoxicated users."

Professor d'Abbs said there was concern in many communities about heavy cannabis and alcohol use, but few observers suggested this had increased as a substitute for petrol sniffing.

"Communities reporting a decline in [petrol](#) sniffing between the two surveys were actually less likely than other communities to report major concerns with alcohol problems."

Researchers also evaluated perceptions about the use of the fuel in vehicles, and documented services in the communities which could have

an impact on sniffing, such as youth programs.

"The study found evidence of improvements in access to intervention services, while youth sport and other recreational activities ranged from being virtually non-existent to satisfactory, with the majority falling somewhere in between."

Low aromatic fuel was widely accepted for use in vehicles, although there were concerns that it might affect small engines such as lawn mowers.

Professor d'Abbs has recently been contracted by the Australian Government to undertake further evaluation of the low aromatic fuel program.

Provided by University of Queensland

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