

Fewer Australians smoking, but illicit trade needs tougher measures

Embargoed until 12:01am AEST Friday 17th July

New data from the 2025 National Drug Strategy Household Survey shows that daily smoking among Australians aged 14 and over fell to 5.6% in 2025—down from 8.3% in 2022–23 and 19.5% in 2001—while daily vaping stabilised after rising rapidly in recent years.

The Australian Council on Smoking and Health (ACOSH) has welcomed the findings as a major public health achievement, while warning that the illicit trade and a changing nicotine market could slow further progress unless governments strengthen enforcement, quitting support and tobacco retail regulation.

ACOSH CEO Laura Hunter said the results confirmed Australia's sustained approach to tobacco control was working.

"This is one of Australia's most trusted and comprehensive health surveys, and it's positive news. Australia now has some of the lowest smoking rates of any high-income country. This is a remarkable public health achievement and shows what sustained, comprehensive tobacco control can achieve. Australia is now within reach of the national target of 5% or less daily smoking by 2030."

However, ACOSH warns these results also underscore the need for tougher and immediate action.

While smoking prevalence continues to fall, the survey indicates that patterns of tobacco and nicotine use are changing, with more people reporting use of three or more nicotine products. Alongside recent Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) wastewater data, the bigger picture suggests that fewer Australians are smoking, but some may be using nicotine across a wider range of products.

"These findings point to a more complex nicotine market and ACOSH is concerned that easy access to cheap illicit tobacco and potentially high-nicotine products such as vapes and nicotine pouches may prolong dependence and make quitting harder."

ACOSH has also heard from medical practitioners reporting that some patients who previously smoked one to five cigarettes a day are now smoking 10 to 15—or an entire pack—because cheap illicit tobacco has dramatically reduced the cost. This makes it even harder for the 90% of smokers who want to quit.

"When illicit cigarettes are cheaper and easier to obtain than evidence-based quitting support, the system is working against people who want to quit."

Ms Hunter said the response needs to be coordinated on multiple fronts to safeguard Australia's reduction in smoking prevalence and support those wanting to quit. Governments need to throw everything at reducing the illicit trade.

"Governments must continue shutting down the illicit tobacco and vape market by beefing up enforcement to close illegal retailers and disrupt organised crime supply chains. This needs



Australian Council on Smoking & Health

money to bring in more boots on the ground and political will across every state and territory to strengthen and enforce tobacco laws.

“Governments also need to make quitting easier by providing free combination nicotine replacement therapy to those engaging with the Quitline. And let’s bring back hard-hitting, highly visible campaigns that get people to think twice about taking up smoking and vaping and build confidence for those wanting to quit.”

Hunter also says Australia has become a low-smoking country, yet tobacco remains as readily available as bread and milk.

“We’ve reduced the number of people smoking, but not the number of places selling tobacco. This deadly product should not be sold on every street corner. Oversupply makes tobacco easier to buy, quitting harder and gives the illicit trade more room to flourish.

“We need to lift the bar on who can sell tobacco, limiting sales to competent, accountable retailers with the governance and systems to comply with the law.”

ACOSH is calling on the Federal Government to lead nationally consistent tobacco retail reform with states and territories.

Around 24,000 Australians die each year from smoking-related disease. Smoking also costs Australia an estimated \$159.7 billion annually through premature death, illness and healthcare expenditure.

For those looking to quit smoking or vaping, visit quit.org.au or call quit 13 78 48 for free confidential advice and support.

Members of the public can report suspected illicit tobacco activity to:

- [Australian Border Force Border Watch](#) for suspected importation or smuggling
- [Crime Stoppers](#) online or on **1800 333 000** for suspicious or criminal activity
- the relevant state or territory tobacco regulator for suspected illegal retail sales

Reports to Border Watch and Crime Stoppers can be made anonymously.