



Evaluation of the Tackling Indigenous Smoking Program 2023- 24 to 2026-27

Full Wave 1 Report (July 2023 – December 2024): Lay Summary

30 May 2025

LAY SUMMARY

The national Tackling Indigenous Smoking (TIS) program aims to lower smoking and vaping rates among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. CIRCA has been asked to look at how the program is going from 2023 to 2027. CIRCA's job is to:

- See how well the TIS program is set up to meet its goals.
- Find out from TIS teams, how much the program is changing what community knows and thinks about smoking and vaping.
- Look for ways the program could improve.

This is a summary of what CIRCA found in the first year of the TIS program, from:

- Interviews and focus groups with TIS National Support stakeholders between October and November 2024
- Interviews with TIS Coordinators between August and December 2024
- Online surveys with TIS CEOs and TIS staff between September and December 2024
- 33 Activity Work Plans (AWPs) from TIS teams in July 2024, and compared to AWPs from July 2023
- 33 Performance Reports (PRs) from the January – June 2024 period, and compared to PRs from the July – December 2023 period
- Progress reports from the National Best Practice Unit (NBPU)

CIRCA's key findings are listed below.

How well is the TIS program set up to meet its goals?

In the first year, CIRCA found that the TIS program was set up well to meet its goals, but there were areas that could improve.

Goal: Reach all communities and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

- By June 2024, TIS teams said they had reached 61% of all communities across the country. This is a good sign that the program will be able to reach all communities by the end of the four years.
- By June 2024, TIS teams also said they had reached about 15% of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. In most places, though, they said they were reaching only 0-24% of people in priority groups (for example, young people, pregnant women, and people in remote communities).

The overall reach is a good start. But the program will need to do more to reach priority groups over the next three years of the program.

- By June 2024, TIS teams said that more than half of their TIS activities reached people who do not attend Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations or Aboriginal Medical Services. This is another priority group for the program. This finding is a good sign the program will be able to achieve its goal to reach all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- TIS teams explained that the following things helped them reach communities and people:
 - Having strong relationships with local communities and groups, especially when TIS staff are from those communities.
 - Running events and sharing messages during important cultural and community times.
 - Using diverse ways to share messages (like posters, social media, and events).
 - Making activities fun and handing out small rewards like TIS-branded t-shirts, hats, and water bottles. These helped get people involved.
 - Creating programs to fit the needs of each community.
 - Creating programs together with the community (this is called co-design).
 - Learning what works well and doing those things again.
 - Planning carefully so that events go smoothly.
- TIS teams explained that these things made it hard for them to reach communities and people:
 - Bad weather or remote locations can make it hard to visit some places.
 - It can take time and effort to work with other organisations.
 - It is not always easy to find and keep skilled staff.

Goal: Work with local communities and services

- By June 2024, TIS teams said they had strong partnerships with local services that help people quit smoking. Teams made many referrals to those services between January and June 2024 (6,426). Teams also said they often worked with community groups to plan and run their TIS activities. They did the same with community members. These are good signs that the program is working with local communities and services.
- Most TIS teams said local communities supported their work to lower smoking and vaping among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Community groups and people shared their time,

materials, space, and access to their networks with TIS teams. But the amount of support TIS teams got from the local community was different in each place. Some areas had strong support, while others did not. This is an area where the program could be improved: more TIS teams working with their local communities, so that this goal can be achieved.

- The most important factor in how well TIS teams work with others is TIS staff and the relationships they have with local communities. These relationships can help a lot—but if they are not strong, they can also make things harder.

Goal: TIS activities respect culture and reflect evidence about smoking and vaping

- At this point in the program, there is strong proof that TIS activities are culturally safe, and they will achieve this goal to respect culture. Most activities used local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander traditions, ideas, and languages. TIS teams also made sure their activities fit each community. They asked for feedback from community, used local resources, and gave staff cultural training when they needed it.
- One thing that could be better about the way the program shows cultural respect would be for all TIS teams to share data with their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Most TIS teams did not share program results or progress with their communities. But a few teams did – through yarns, social media posts, handouts, and other ways that suited the community.
- Having Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff helped TIS teams run activities that respect culture. It can be hard to find and hire local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff though. It is also hard to meet the different cultural needs of each community.
- By June 2024, almost all (97%) TIS activities were based on good research (evidence). TIS teams also helped grow the evidence by talking with communities and doing their own research to see what works. These are both great signs that the program reflects evidence about smoking and vaping and will keep doing so through the end of the four years.
- Getting helpful ideas from the National Supports team and from other TIS teams helped teams run evidence-based activities. What made it hard to run evidence-based activities was TIS staff leaving or not having enough training.

Goal: TIS teams are supported by their organisations and the TIS National Support team

- In 2024, TIS teams got various kinds of help from the National Support team. The most used supports were: jurisdictional workshops (meetings of TIS teams from across the country); and the TIS website (that has resources and information for TIS teams on it). But, about 1 in 4 TIS staff said they had had no contact or support from the National Support team since the program started in 2023. This is an area for improvement in future years. That 3 in 4 TIS staff said they were supported by the TIS National Support team though is a good sign the program is set up to reach this goal in the coming years.

- TIS Coordinators and staff said the most helpful supports were: jurisdictional workshops; help filling out reports (AWPs and PRs); the NBPU newsletter; and updates from the National Coordinator.
 - They said National Supports helped them understand: which activities are allowed under the TIS grant and which are not; evidence-based approaches to e-cigarette control; where to find information about evidence-based approaches to tobacco and e-cigarette control; and why to draw on local knowledge when developing tobacco and e-cigarette control activities.
- In 2024, TIS organisations also got help from the National Support team. That help included workshops for CEOs, site visits, newsletters, phone calls, and emails.
 - TIS CEOs said that these activities helped them understand what activities they are allowed to do; how to spend money the right way; how to work with other organisations; what population health approaches are; and that it is important for CEOs to be leaders in pushing for culturally safe, evidence-based population health approaches to tobacco and e-cigarette control. These are all good signs the program is set up to reach its goal for TIS teams to be supported by their organisations; and the National Support team.
 - We also found, however, that some TIS CEOs did not understand rules about staff arrangements. So, this is an area where improvement could be made.

According to TIS teams, how much is the program changing what community knows and thinks about smoking and vaping?

In the first year, CIRCA found that TIS teams had some success changing what community knows and thinks about smoking and vaping. But there were some areas that could be improved.

- By June 2024, TIS teams said they were most successful teaching community about: the dangers of smoking and vaping; and the benefits of not using tobacco or vapes. They said that over 75% of their activities helped improve people's knowledge in those areas.
- By June 2024, teams said they were moderately successful at: teaching community about the benefits of quitting and the benefits of smoke-free spaces; encouraging people to want to quit smoking or vaping; encouraging people to create smoke- or aerosol-free environments; and helping people decide not to start smoking or vaping. They said that around 60% of their activities created positive changes in those areas. While this is a good start so early in the program, this is an area where the program could be better into the future.
- By June 2024, TIS teams said they were least successful at: getting people to stay away from second-hand smoke or aerosol; and getting people to go to smoke-free events or places. This is an area where the program could be much better in the coming years and see more consistent and greater successes across regions.

- TIS teams shared that getting people to interact with messages through posters, videos, and games worked well. It helped people understand the danger of second-hand smoke and plan to avoid it.
- At this time in the program, TIS teams said they faced challenges to changing what community knows and thinks about smoking and vaping. The biggest challenge was working in communities where smoking is quite common, and people do not want to change. One way TIS teams said they handled this was by sharing anti-smoking messages at cultural or community events. This helped show that health and culture can go together.

What are some ways the program could be improved?

To achieve the goal: Reach all communities and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

- Build on the successes of reaching 61% of all communities and 15% of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the first year. Work to reach more communities and people in the next years of the program.
- TIS teams should use the strategies listed on page 3 to reach more communities and people.
- TIS teams may need more support to reach more communities and people, get more people engaged, build partnerships, and hire and keep skilled staff.

To reach the goal: Work with local communities and services

- Most TIS teams are working well with local communities and services. But this is not the same everywhere. There needs to be more consistent collaboration with local communities across all TIS teams.
- TIS teams should be supported and encouraged to: connect more with local communities and services; and to hire and retain staff who have or can build good relationships with local people and organisations.

To reach the goal: TIS activities respect culture and reflect evidence about smoking and vaping

- Build on the success that TIS activities are culturally safe. Share more program data with the community, as another sign of cultural respect.
- Build on the success that TIS activities are evidence-based and that teams are creating evidence. Continue to create chances for teams working in similar places (like remote or city areas) to learn from each other.

To reach the goal: TIS teams are supported by their organisations and the TIS National Support team

- TIS staff had some ideas to improve support from their organisations and from the National Support team:
 - Make it easier to find and understand what support NBPU offers.

- Share information better between TIS lead organisations and their funded partners.
- Help TIS staff understand how much money they have available for activities in their regions.
- Remind CEOs and TIS teams what staffing arrangements are allowed and encouraged under the TIS grant.
- Help TIS lead organisations work better with their funded partner organisations.

To change what community knows and thinks about smoking and vaping

- TIS teams should keep collecting good information about the impact of their activities. They need to understand if they are changing what people in community know and think about smoking and vaping.
- Teams may need to try out lots of different things to change people's minds about smoking and vaping in places where smoking is quite common. It will be important for the program to encourage teams to try things like: sharing anti-smoking messages at cultural or community events; framing quitting as a step toward healing and justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; and other things, so they can see what works for their communities.



Tenancy 3, 16 Eveleigh Street

REDFERN NSW 2016

Tel: +61 2 8585 1353