

Tobacco Control News

October 2025

PHAA Australian Public Health Conference 2025



Hi TIS Teams!

In September, I had the opportunity to attend the Australian Public Health Conference on Dharawal Country (Wollongong), alongside a few colleagues from the NBPU TIS. This year's theme, 'Leadership and collaboration to connect a divided world', highlighted how public health leadership, grounded in collaboration and community voice, can tackle complex challenges and reduce health inequities. Throughout the conference, there was a focus on strengthening partnerships, growing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, and taking systems-based approaches to health promotion. These themes underpinned the entire program, with tobacco control and youth anti vaping programs discussed as part of a much broader health and wellbeing agenda. It was great to see the Tackling Indigenous Smoking (TIS) program recognised multiple times as an example of success in this space.

In her conference opening the Assistant Minister for Health and Aged Care, the Honorable Rebecca White MP, recognised the TIS Program as a standout example of Indigenous-led, systems-focused work – a program that brings together strong partnerships and community leadership to drive real progress in tobacco control and overall wellbeing. This was a proud moment and a powerful reminder of the positive impact the program is having in communities across the country.

National Coordinator TIS Professor Tom Calma AO, took part in an engaging panel discussion "Indigenous voices in shaping our future" alongside other respected panellists Kristine Falzon, Dr. Alana Gall and Professor Bronwyn Fredericks. The panellists reflected on the Voice Referendum and discussed the importance of Indigenous leadership for driving meaningful community change. Professor Calma highlighted the success of the TIS program, noting that its impact has been driven by community empowerment, self-determination, and strong support for local initiatives.

Across the sessions, many speakers spoke about the importance of sharing knowledge, building strong relationships, and working together to address public health challenges. A common message throughout was that to create real change, especially in communities that experience disadvantage, we need to listen, include all voices, and work in genuine partnership.



Key themes of the conference: partnership, Aboriginal leadership, and systems thinking.



[TACKLINGSMOKING.ORG.AU](https://tacklingsmoking.org.au)

Here are some key takeaways from the conference:

Evidence of Impact: TIS is Making a Difference

New research from Dr Christina Heris and Associate Professor Lisa Whop (Yardhura Walani, ANU) shows that the TIS program is helping to reduce smoking during pregnancy. Their analysis of over 170,000 births found faster declines in TIS-funded areas, clearly showing that sustained investment in community-led approaches such as TIS will help to close the gap in maternal and child health.

Youth Voices Are Key to Tackling Vaping

Programs to address youth vaping are more effective when young people have a say in how they are designed. Co-design initiatives like the Pave app create relevant and engaging messages and tools to help youth quit vaping. When young people help shape the messages and solutions, programs are more likely to connect and make a real difference.

Supporting GPs to Address Vaping

A recent national survey of GPs showed many doctors don't routinely ask patients about vaping or use standardised tools to find out how often or how much people vape. There is uncertainty about the best ways to support people who vape to quit, highlighting a need for clearer guidance and resources for GPs.

Family Influence on Youth Vaping

Research shows that young people are more likely to vape if their parents have ever used vapes. This highlights the important role families play in shaping youth behaviour and suggests that involving parents in vaping prevention could make programs more effective.

Reducing Tobacco Retailers in Remote Areas

Research from the Northern Territory shows that tobacco retailers are more densely located in remote communities. This raises important questions about how controlling the number and location of shops that sell tobacco could help reduce smoking rates. Any changes to how tobacco is sold must be shaped by the community and supported by access to culturally safe quit support.

Shifting the Focus from Tobacco Control to Nicotine Harm Prevention

Across multiple sessions, there was a noticeable shift from tobacco control to a broader focus on nicotine products. Presenters highlighted the need for public health messaging and policy to respond to all forms of nicotine related harms, not just those from tobacco smoking.

Reducing Health Misinformation

Misinformation about smoking and vaping is a serious health threat. Using trusted community voices and improving digital health literacy helps people spot and avoid misleading information. Community-led digital health communication strategies are essential for building resilience and supporting people to make healthier choices.

Linking Smoking Cessation with Other Health Services

Integrating tobacco control with other health checks offers more opportunities to support people in quitting. For example, new initiatives like the National Lung Cancer Screening Program will include smoking cessation support, showing how quitting smoking can be part of broader health care.

Take Home Message for TIS Teams

The 2025 Australian Public Health Conference showed what many of us already know: when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices lead, and communities are empowered to shape their own health journeys, outcomes are stronger. The TIS program demonstrates the impact of sustained, locally led community-driven approaches. Ongoing challenges including youth vaping, retailer regulation, and misinformation show the continued need for adaptable, community-focused health promotion – strengths that are already central to the TIS program.

Key Takeaway

Community-led, locally driven approaches like TIS deliver better health outcomes and are key to addressing ongoing challenges in tobacco control.

