

Tobacco Control News

Evidence in Brief – March 2026

The Ottawa Charter Turns 40

Learning from Indigenous Sovereignty and Resistance



Hi TIS Teams!

This month I'm sharing a quick update on the Ottawa Charter, which turns 40 this year. Recent research looking at the Ottawa Charter through an Indigenous perspective shows tobacco companies are still harming communities. This includes influencing digital health information and flooding the market with nicotine products. In this evidence update, you'll find a quick recap of what the Ottawa Charter stands for, the challenges it faces today, and what this means for TIS work to reduce nicotine-related harm.

The Ottawa Charter

A Quick Recap

The Ottawa Charter is a global framework for health promotion. It reminds us that health is more than "not being sick". It focuses on improving the conditions people live, work and grow in – not just individual behaviour change.

Health is about living well physically, mentally and socially. The Ottawa Charter outlines the foundations needed for this: peace, shelter, education, food, income, a stable environment, sustainable resources, social justice and equity. Without these, good health isn't possible.

Building on these foundations, the TIS program is grounded in decades of leadership and advocacy for social justice and the social determinants of health. The TIS program brings these values to life every day, led by communities, grounded in culture, and driven by collective strength.

If you're interested in how the program has evolved over time, you can explore more via the [Digital Repository Tackling Indigenous Smoking](#)

Five Action Areas of Ottawa Charter

The Ottawa Charter puts health promotion into practice through five action areas:

Building Healthy Public Policy

Creating rules and laws that support health.

Creating Supportive Environments

Ensuring places like schools, workplaces and neighbourhoods make healthy choices easier.

Strengthening Community Action

Supporting communities to lead, collaborate and have control over their own health projects.

Developing Personal Skills

Building knowledge and skills so people can make informed, healthy decisions.

Reorienting Health Services

Shifting health systems to focus on prevention and health promotion, not just treating illness.

Three Strategies of the Ottawa Charter

These action areas are guided by three key strategies:

Advocate

Calling for political, social, cultural, environmental and economic changes that support health.

Enable

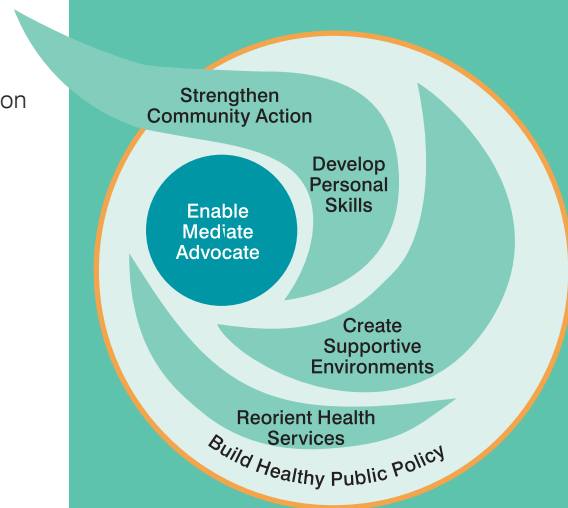
Making sure everyone has a fair chance at good health by providing support, resources and power to enable people to control their own wellbeing.

Mediate

Bringing governments, organisations and communities together to work towards shared health goals.

Why this Matters Now

40 years on, the Ottawa Charter is facing new challenges from the tobacco industry. Tobacco companies continue to use colonial and racial systems to create and maintain health inequities for Aboriginal and Torres Islander peoples, and for Indigenous peoples globally. They are influencing the digital health information people receive and oversupplying tobacco products – profiting from addiction, illness and community harm.



Take Home Message for TIS

TIS is more than a program. It is a community-led movement grounded in culture, connection and collective strength. It shows that real change happens when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities lead, when youth are supported to shape solutions, and when we actively challenge the systems that allow tobacco harms to continue. By strengthening youth leadership, advocating for reduced tobacco availability, calling out digital misinformation, and ensuring genuine community decision-making power, TIS is turning the vision of the Ottawa Charter into action: building strong, smoke- and vape-free futures led by community, for community.



NATIONAL BEST PRACTICE UNIT
TACKLING INDIGENOUS SMOKING

In depth Paper Review

Maddox, R., Kornacki, C., Bradbrook, S. K., & Calma, T. (2025). The Ottawa Charter: Indigenous sovereignty, resistance, and health promotion at 40. *Health Promotion International*, 40(6). <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daaf195>



This paper looks back on 40 years of the Ottawa Charter and shows that while it still matters, the Charter needs to evolve to better address the ongoing inequities faced by Indigenous peoples. It highlights how health is shaped not just by individual choices, but by the broader systems and power, especially the role of commercial industries and digital environments. The authors call for a stronger focus on Indigenous sovereignty, justice and community-led action in health promotion.

Key Messages

- Tobacco industry interferes in government decisions, influences digital platforms and how easy it is to access tobacco and nicotine products.
- Indigenous youth already show strong leadership through art, cultural continuity and community action.
- Health promotion programs should put Indigenous youth leadership at the centre and work to reduce inequality.
- We need to speak up about the tobacco industry and false or misleading digital health information.
- The paper acknowledges the success of TIS activities – health promotion programs work best when they are designed and led by Indigenous communities and fully funded.

How TIS Brings the Ottawa Charter to Life

Your daily TIS work aligns with the Ottawa Charter in action. Here is how:

Healthy Public Policy

- Supporting smoke-free and vape-free community events.
- Advocating for fewer tobacco retailers near schools, youth spaces and health services.
- Sharing evidence with councils and local decision-makers about tobacco oversupply.

Find more information here:

- [Smoke-free](#)
- [Keep Our Place a Smoke Free Space Resource Package](#)

Supportive Environments

- Creating culturally safe, smoke-free spaces for yarning, youth programs and community gatherings.
- Partnering with sporting clubs, art centres and workplaces to promote smoke and vape-free living.
- Supporting Elders and community leaders to model smoke and vape-free behaviours.

Find more information here:

- [Community Engagement](#)
- [Lismore Aboriginal Knockout](#)

Strengthening Community Action

- Co-designing youth-led campaigns that use art, culture and language to challenge tobacco harms.
- Running yarning circles to identify local solutions and build collective strength.
- Working with ACCHOs, schools and community groups to deliver smoke-free initiatives.

Find more information here:

- [Resources to support activities](#)
- [Fitzroy Valley Initiative](#)

Developing Personal Skills

- Providing very brief advice, quit support and culturally grounded health education.
- Running workshops on digital misinformation and how to recognise industry tactics.
- Sharing clear, plain-language resources on quitting, vaping harms and smoke-free living.

Find more information here:

- [Very Brief Advice](#)
- [Community Education](#)
- [On Country Event at Sandy Creek](#)

Reorientating Health Services

- Working with local health services to prioritise prevention and early support.

Find more information here:

- [Let's say BUH-BYE to smoking and vaping](#)

Looking Forward

TIS is more than a program – it is a community-led movement grounded in culture, connection and collective strength. The insights from this paper reinforce what we already know: real change happens when communities lead, when young people shape solutions, and when we challenge the systems that allow tobacco harms to continue. This is about strengthening youth leadership, resisting industry influence, reducing supply, and calling out misinformation – because protecting future generations demands resistance.

