

Tobacco Control News

Evidence in Brief - May 2026

First Nation Burden of Disease Study 2022



Hello everyone,

This month we're looking at the latest **First Nations Burden of Disease 2022 study** from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). Published in March 2026, the study highlights the health burden caused by diseases linked to tobacco smoking, including conditions such as heart disease, cancer, respiratory disease, and lung conditions. These diseases are among the leading causes of poor health and early death among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

What is Burden of Disease?

Burden of disease is a way of measuring how illness affects people's lives. It looks at:

- years of life lost due to early death
- years lived with illness, pain, or disability
- the overall impact on health and wellbeing

In simple terms, it helps show how disease can affect people over time, including long-term illness and early death.

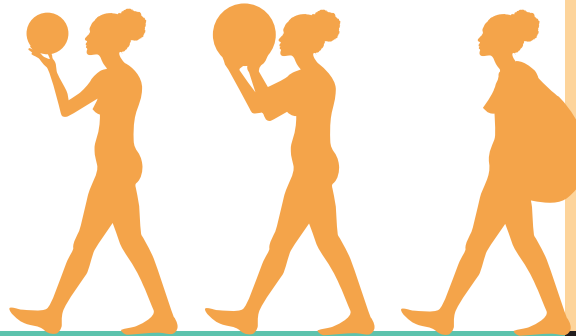
What is the Study About?

The study looks at the burden of disease experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including the impact of smoking commercial tobacco. This includes:

- how pain, disability and illness affect people's daily lives and wellbeing
- how disease and commercial tobacco use can shorten life by causing early death
- the long-term effects of tobacco-related disease on quality of life

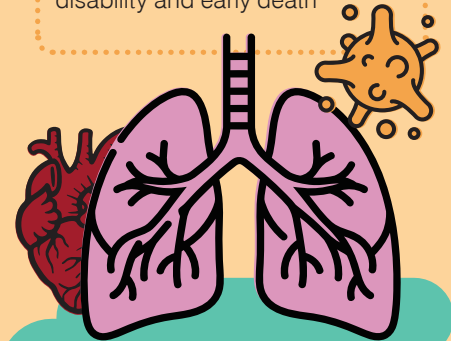
The study reports disease burden in two ways:

- broad disease groups (for example, cardiovascular disease, cancer, respiratory disease)
- specific diseases and conditions within those groups (for example, coronary heart disease (CHD), lung cancer, asthma).



Burden of Disease Snapshot

In 2022, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Peoples lost **317,083** years of healthy life due to illness, disability and early death



Cardiovascular disease, cancer and respiratory disease associated with commercial tobacco smoking are the main contributors to illness and early death

Understanding Burden of Disease Terms

The Burden of Disease Study uses several public health terms to describe the impact of illness, disability and early death on a population. These include:

DALY Disability Adjusted Life Year
A measure of the total burden of disease. DALY combines both fatal and non-fatal burden, including years of life lost due to early death and years lived with illness, injury or disability.

YLD Years Lived with Disability
A measure of the non-fatal burden of disease. It reflects years lived with illness, injury or disability that impacts quality of life.

YLL Years of Life Lost
A measure of the fatal burden of disease. It reflects years of life lost due to premature death from disease or injury.



Healthy life

Disease or disability

••••• Early death

Expected years of life

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How Does Tobacco Contribute to the Burden of Disease?

Commercial tobacco smoking is a major contributor to illness, disability and early death among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. In 2022, some of the main disease groups contributing to illness and early death included:

- cardiovascular disease (11% of total burden)
- cancer (11% of total burden)
- respiratory disease (7.8% of total burden)

Within these disease groups the leading cause of burden of disease was coronary heart disease, contributing 6% of the total burden of disease. Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), a lung disease mainly caused by smoking, also contributed 4% of the total burden.

What is Improving?

While challenges remain, there has been important progress. Between 2011 and 2022 there were significant improvements in the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples:

- the overall health burden decreased by 6.3%
- early deaths reduced by 11%

These improvements show the positive impact of prevention, education, community leadership and tobacco reduction initiatives. While significant health inequities still remain, this progress highlights the strength and impact of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led health initiatives.

Where do we need to do more work?

The health impacts of commercial tobacco smoking continue to affect many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Long-term conditions such as lung disease, cancer and heart disease remain major causes of illness, disability and early death. Mental health conditions, substance use, chronic disease and injuries also continue to contribute significantly to the overall burden of disease.

These health issues affect not only individuals, but also families, communities and future generations. While progress has been made, ongoing work is needed to support culturally safe, community-led health promotion activities focused on preventing smoking uptake and promoting quitting.

Commercial tobacco use and cultural safety are closely connected. Cultural safety means creating safe, respectful and supportive environments where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples feel comfortable talking about smoking and making decisions about quitting.

Why does this matter for the Tackling Indigenous Smoking (TIS) Program?

The evidence shows that programs like TIS are important in improving health and wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Reducing the prevalence of commercial tobacco smoking can:

- lower the risk of heart disease, lung disease and cancer;
- improve quality of life and community wellbeing;
- support healthier futures for families and future generations.

TIS teams make a difference by:

- Promoting quitting and preventing uptake of commercial tobacco
- Raising awareness of quit smoking services and programs.
- Increasing knowledge of the harms linked to smoking and the benefits of quitting.
- Providing culturally safe, community-led education and support
- Empowering communities to lead positive health change.

Take Home Message for TIS Teams

Positive progress is being made, but commercial tobacco smoking continues to contribute to illness, early death, and health inequities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. TIS teams play an important role in supporting culturally safe, community-led smoking health promotion and healthier futures for communities. It is never too late to quit smoking.

