

Tobacco Control News

Connie's Conference Corner – July 2026

Lessons from the World Indigenous Cancer Conference and PHAA Preventive Health Conference



Hi TIS Teams,

I recently spread my wings to attend two inspiring conferences: the World Indigenous Cancer Conference (WICC) 2026 in Tāmaki Makaurau, Aotearoa (Auckland, New Zealand), and the Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) Preventive Health Conference in Nipaluna Country (Hobart, Tasmania). Although each conference had a different focus, both offered valuable insights for the TIS program. Here are some of my biggest takeaways.

Take Home Message for TIS Teams

Across both conferences, I was reminded that prevention is a long-term commitment. Whether it was discussions about Indigenous leadership, cultural safety, co-design, continuous quality improvement or evaluation, the message was the same: effective prevention is built through strong relationships, learning from evidence, and continually adapting to meet the needs of communities.

What I learnt at WICC 2026

At WICC, I joined Indigenous leaders, health workers, researchers and community members from across the world – including Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, Canada and Turtle Island (USA) – to share knowledge and experiences. I was especially proud to see the TIS program represented through our poster on the [Digital Repository Tackling Indigenous Smoking \(DR TIS\)](#). It was great to share the Repository with delegates from around the world, and even better to hear Uncle Tom and Raglan give a shout-out to both the TIS program and the Digital Repository during the conference.

The conference theme, Mana Tāngata – collective strength through aroha (love), kotahitanga (unity) and manaakitanga (care), was reflected throughout the program, with presentations consistently highlighting the importance of Indigenous leadership, community strength and culturally grounded approaches to health and wellbeing.

My Top 5 Takeaways from WICC

1. Communities already hold the solutions

Indigenous communities have the knowledge, strengths and leadership to improve health. The role of health systems is to support community-led action.

2. Healing is holistic

Healing is physical, spiritual, cultural, collective and intergenerational. Traditional and Western approaches can work together.

3. Culture is a strength

Storytelling, ceremony, connection to Country and Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing were consistently recognised as protective factors.

4. Traditional tobacco is different from commercial tobacco

Respecting traditional tobacco while continuing to address the harms of commercial tobacco was a recurring discussion.

5. Self-determination needs accountability

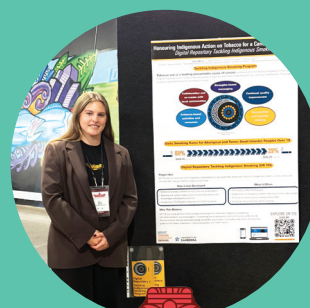
Indigenous leadership must be supported by meaningful action, shared responsibility and systems that measure what matters.

The conference also challenged deficit-based thinking about Indigenous health. Speakers emphasised that health inequities are not the result of Indigenous identity or biology, but are shaped by broader social, environmental and colonial factors. Across many sessions, the focus was on removing these barriers while recognising and building on the strengths, resilience and leadership already present within communities.

One message I heard wherever I perched was the emphasis on self-determination and accountability. Achieving health equity requires Indigenous leadership, shared responsibility and clear ownership of actions. It also requires meaningful measures of success and ongoing monitoring to ensure that commitments are translated into real and lasting change.



WORLD INDIGENOUS CANCER CONFERENCE



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

What I learnt at the PHAA Preventive Health Conference 2026

My next stop as I flew home was the [PHAA Preventive Health Conference](#) in Nipaluna Country (Hobart, Tasmania). The theme, Sustaining Prevention was a timely reminder that improving health outcomes requires long-term commitment, investment and systems that support prevention over time.

For those of us working in TIS, this message felt very familiar. Tackling the harms associated with commercial tobacco and vaping is not achieved through one-off campaigns or short-term projects. It relies on sustained partnerships with communities, supportive policies and ongoing investment in prevention. The conference also celebrated [40 years of the Ottawa Charter](#) and 40 years of cancer prevention leadership from Cancer Council Victoria, reinforcing that meaningful improvements in health are built over decades, not months.

My Top 5 Takeaways from PHAA

1. Prevention takes time

Lasting improvements in health rely on long-term investment, strong partnerships, supportive policy and a commitment to continuous quality improvement. Regular evaluation, meaningful data and ongoing learning help ensure programs continue to meet community needs and make a difference.

2. Communities know what works

The strongest programs are built with communities, not for them. Co-design, lived experience, community leadership and understanding what success looks like for local communities all help create more relevant, culturally appropriate and effective programs.

3. Meet people where they are

Building trust means understanding people's readiness for change and having honest, compassionate and non-judgemental conversations. Tailoring support to different communities and groups helps ensure health messages are relevant, respectful and meaningful.

4. Prevention means staying one step ahead

The tobacco and nicotine landscape continues to evolve, with new products and industry tactics. Keeping communities informed with clear, independent and evidence-based information about nicotine dependence and emerging products remains an important part of prevention.

5. Healthy communities need healthy systems

Good prevention extends beyond individual behaviour. Strong policies, smoke-free and vape-free environments, reducing tobacco availability, culturally safe approaches and addressing racism all contribute to healthier communities and better health outcomes.

I left the conference with a renewed appreciation that prevention is an ongoing journey. Strong relationships, community leadership, continuous learning and evidence-informed practice all play an important role in creating lasting change – and these are the principles that continue to underpin the work of TIS teams across Australia.

I've also put together a few practical tips from the conference to help you apply these ideas in your own TIS activities, so keep an eye out for *Connie's Prevention Toolkit*, coming soon!

I flew home from the two conferences with plenty of ideas and inspiration, proud to see the TIS program and the Digital Repository recognised on both national and international stages, but even prouder of the TIS teams whose community-led, culturally grounded work is making a real difference in supporting healthier, stronger and smoke-free communities across Australia.

TIS in the Spotlight

It was fantastic to see the TIS program well represented across both conferences.

Digital Repository Tackling Indigenous Smoking (DR TIS)

Remy Morris presented a poster at WICC and an oral presentation at the Preventive Health Conference, showcasing the Digital Repository as a living archive preserving the history and evolution of the TIS program.

We Breathe – Tackling Indigenous Smoking

Soozie Gillies and the We Breathe team shared their evaluation of youth education activities promoting healthy choices among young people in south-east NSW at the Preventive Health Conference.

NBPU TIS Evaluation

Onike Williams and Tim Tuikaba gave a presentation at the Preventive Health conference which talked about how the NBPU evaluates its partnerships with TIS-funded organisations to strengthen our work with teams.

NBPU TIS Exhibition Stall

It was wonderful to connect with delegates from across Australia and internationally and showcase the work of the TIS program at the Preventive Health Conference.

