

Tobacco Control News

Evidence in Brief September 2025

Protective Factors for Never Smoking among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth



Hi TIS Teams!

I'm excited to share new findings from the Next Generation: Youth Wellbeing Study, led by distinguished Professor Sandra Eades AO. Their [latest paper](#) focuses on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth aged 10–15 years and explores what helps them choose not to smoke. This study found that most youth (90%) had never smoked and were motivated by their own health, family and friends to be smoke-free. More than half of the study participants said worry about their health was a key reason for not smoking. The second most common reason was that family or friends told them not to, highlighting the important role of supportive, positive relationships and strong social norms.

Protective factors for never smoking included:

- Having friends who do not smoke
- Living in a smoke-free home
- Not drinking alcohol
- Taking part in recreational activities
- Being engaged at school
- Having good mental and physical health
- No involvement with the criminal justice system

You can read my in-depth review of this paper below.

Take home Message for TIS Teams:

The ages 10–15 are a critical time for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth to make smoke-free choices that benefit long-term health. As TIS teams, your work to promote smoke-free homes, schools, and communities provides the supportive environments youth need to be able to make those choices. Encouraging youth to stay engaged in education, sport, and cultural activities supports their overall wellbeing and strengthens protective factors against smoking. By promoting good mental and physical health alongside clear, positive smoke-free messages within families and communities, you help build resilience and a strong sense of identity. Make culture, family, and connection to Country central to your work. Using strengths-based approaches like these empowers youth and supports continued reductions in smoking rates among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Next Generation Youth Wellbeing Study

The Next Generation Youth Wellbeing Study is a strengths-based study that is following Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth aged 10–24 across urban, rural and remote areas in Central Australia (CA), WA and NSW. It aims to understand the factors that support or challenge their health and wellbeing as they grow up. The study collects both survey and clinical data over time to help improve policies, programs and health services that better meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth. You can read more about the project [here](#).

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NATIONAL BEST
PRACTICE UNIT
**TACKLING
INDIGENOUS
SMOKING**

In depth Paper Review

Heris, C. L., Graham, S., Williams, R., Yashadhana, A., Davis, K., Whitby, J., Fields, T., O'Leary, M., Banks, E., McKay, C. D., Eades, F., Ivers, R., Joshy, G., Gubhaju, L., Liu, B., Rahman, T., & Eades, S. (2025). Generation smoke-free: Protective factors for never smoking among young First Nations peoples aged 10–15 years in the Next Generation Youth Wellbeing Study. *First Nations Health and Wellbeing - The Lowitja Journal*, 3, 100078. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fnhli.2025.100078>

This study recruited 682 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth aged 10–15 years through community networks including:

- personal contacts
- Aboriginal community organisations
- sports clubs
- youth centres
- peer recruitment

Participants completed surveys between March 2018 and March 2020. Most (67%) were from WA, just over a quarter were from NSW (27%), and a small group (5%) were from CA. Slightly more were female than male (53% vs 47%), and more were aged 10–12 than 13–15 years (56% vs 44%). Participants were asked: “Have you ever tried smoking a tobacco cigarette?”. Based on their answers they were grouped as either ‘never smoked’ or ‘ever smoked’.

What is peer recruitment?

Peer recruitment is when people already taking part in a research study, program, or other activity help find others like them to join. For example, a participant might invite their friends, family, or community members. It works well because people often trust information more when it comes from someone they know. Peer recruitment can also help reach people who might not otherwise hear about the study or feel comfortable joining on their own.

Take home Message

Most 10–15 year old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth have never smoked, motivated by their own health and the influence of family and friends. Factors linked to never smoking include having smoke-free friends and homes, avoiding alcohol, being physically active, engaged at school, and having good mental health. Clear smoke-free expectations and regular school attendance protect against smoking uptake. Participation in community sport and social activities keeps youth connected and healthy. These findings show the importance of creating supportive smoke-free environments at home, school, and in the community to help youth grow up smoke free.

Clear smoke-free expectations and regular school attendance protect against smoking uptake



Key Findings

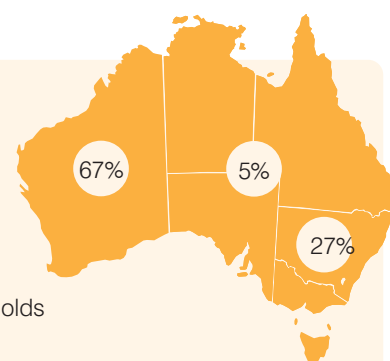
- Most youth (90%) had never smoked tobacco. Their motivation to stay smoke-free came from wanting to be healthy, as well as influence from family and friends.
- Never smoking was associated with having friends who don't smoke, living in smoke-free homes, not drinking alcohol, participating in recreational activities, being engaged at school, and having good mental and physical health.
- Having no interactions with the criminal justice system was also an important factor linked to never smoking.
- Clearly communicating smoke-free expectations at home, in schools, and in the community helped discourage smoking uptake among participants.
- A higher proportion of participants who attended school daily had never smoked.
- Smoking behaviour among youth is influenced by the social norms and expectations set at home and school.
- Participation in community sport, recreation, and social activities helps youth keep active, connected and healthy – supporting mental wellbeing, keeping blood pressure in check and protecting against smoking, – especially when they are part of broader health-promoting environments.

Study Limitations

- The results may not be representative of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth as participants were only recruited from WA, NSW and CA.
- Some participants may have under-reported smoking or other behaviours due to stigma or shame. This could have meant that some participants were placed into the wrong group (never smoked/ever smoked).
- As this study follows a cohort (a group of people with shared characteristics – in this case age and background), some participants who reported never smoking may start in the future.
- This was a cross-sectional study, meaning it provides a snapshot at one point in time. It can show associations but not whether one factor causes another.

682

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth aged 10–15 years



56%
10-12 year olds

44%
13-15 year olds



Participants completed surveys between
March 2018 and March 2020



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