

Smoking in the Northern Territory

Introduction

Tobacco smoking is the leading preventable cause of death and disease in Australia. In 2018, tobacco smoking was responsible for more than 20,500 deaths, or 13% of total deaths from all causes, and 8.6% of total burden of disease and injury in Australia was due to tobacco use, making it the leading risk factor that contributed to disease burden and deaths.¹

This factsheet provides a summary of smoking information to support planning, implementation and evaluation of health services and programs in the Northern Territory (NT).

Smoking prevalence

This section includes estimates of current smoking prevalence, as well as prevalence over time. Data in this report were sourced from various administrative data sets and surveys, all of which have limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results.

Table 1 shows the prevalence of current daily smokers by age and sex among the total NT and Australian population respectively. Current daily smokers are those who smoke one or more cigarettes (either manufactured or roll-your-own), cigars or pipes per day, on average. Chewing tobacco and smoking of substances other than tobacco are excluded.

Data for this table were sourced from the National Drug Strategy Household Surveys (NDSHS),² Australian Health Survey 2011–12 (AHS)³ and National Health Surveys (NHS).^{4,5}

All surveys found a marked reduction in smoking rates among the total NT population, particularly among males. While this decline has reduced the gap between NT and Australian smoking prevalence, Territorians still had a higher prevalence of smoking in 2019 when compared with the Australian population.

Table 1 Prevalence of current daily smokers (per cent), Northern Territory and Australia, by survey type, year and sex

Surveys	Year	Northern Territory			Australia		
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
NDSHS (age 14+)	2010	27.3	16.8	22.3	16.4	13.9	15.1
NDSHS (age 14+)	2013	23.8	18.5	21.3	14.5	11.2	12.8
NDSHS (age 14+)	2016	18.6	15.7	17.2	13.8	10.7	12.2
NDSHS (age 14+)	2019	16.7	12.5	14.7	12.2	9.9	11.0
AHS (age 18+)	2011–12	27.7	22.2	25.0	18.2	14.4	16.3
NHS (age 18+)	2014–15	22.3	18.1	20.9	16.9	12.1	14.5
NHS (age 18+)	2017–18	21.9	17.3	19.6	16.5	11.1	13.8

Table 2 shows the prevalence of current daily smokers by age and sex among the total NT Aboriginal population and Australian Aboriginal population respectively. Data for this table were sourced from the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) 2014–15,⁶ Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey 2012–13 (AATSIHS),⁷ and National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey 2018–19 (NATSIHS).⁸

The prevalence of current daily smoking among NT Aboriginal residents was substantially higher than all Aboriginal Australians in all surveys shown in Table 2 and the gap in smoking rates remained constant according to data collected in the health surveys: AATSIHS 2012–13⁷ and NATSIHS 2018–19.⁸

Males were more likely than females to be daily smokers in all population groups and all surveys.

Table 2 Prevalence of current daily smokers (per cent) among Aboriginal people aged 18 years and over, Northern Territory and Australia, by survey type, year and sex

Surveys	Year	Northern Territory			Australia		
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
NATSISS (age 18+)	2014-15	53.7	39.2	46.1	43.8	39.2	41.4
AATSIHS (age 18+)	2012-13	58.1	43.8	50.8	43.6	39.6	41.6
NATSIHS (age 18+)	2018-19	54.9	44.4	49.5	42.0	38.7	40.2

Table 3 Prevalence of current daily smokers (per cent) among Aboriginal people aged 15 years and over, by Northern Territory Indigenous Regions, survey type, year and sex

Remoteness	AATSIHS 2012-13			NATSIHS 2018-19		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Alice Springs	56.8	40.2	46.9	44.1	41.9	42.9
Apatula	48.1	23.0	35.2	52.3	49.6	50.9
Darwin	41.8	38.7	40.1	37.3	33.6	35.4
Jabiru - Tiwi	60.8	55.3	58.3	53.2	48.7	51.0
Katherine	75.5	61.6	68.0	53.7	49.0	51.4
Nhulunbuy	69.9	49.8	61.5	56.2	53.2	54.7
Tennant Creek	47.7	22.2	36.1	54.6	50.6	52.7

Table 3 shows the proportion of Aboriginal current daily smokers aged 15 and over by NT Indigenous Regions and sex. Data for this table were sourced from the AATSIHS 2012-13⁷ and the NATSIHS 2018-19⁸ respectively. In the 2012-13 survey, the highest proportion of Aboriginal current daily smokers resided in the Katherine region (68%) and the lowest proportion resided in the Apatula region (35%) respectively. In the 2018-19 survey, the highest proportion of current daily smokers resided in the Nhulunbuy region (55%) and the lowest proportion resided in the Darwin region (35%) respectively.

The breakdown of smoking among Aboriginal people by geographic region is limited to two time periods only, and we caution against identifying trends from these data.

Figures 1-3 present the smoking status of Aboriginal clients aged 15 years and over who attended an NT Government remote primary health care clinic during the period 2016-2019.⁹ This source of data for these figures is the Primary Care Information System (PCIS) which records patient encounters in 49 clinics across the NT (excludes Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation controlled clinics).

Figure 1 showed no change in the smoking status of Aboriginal clients across the NT. Just over half (55%) of clinic attendees were reported on PCIS as being a current smoker every year.

This trend was not consistent across the regions. Figure 2 and 3 show the proportion of Aboriginal current smokers in the Top End was substantially higher than in Central Australia (63% versus 40% in 2016 and 61% versus 40% in 2019). There was a slight decline among Top End current smokers whereas the proportion in Central Australia was unchanged.

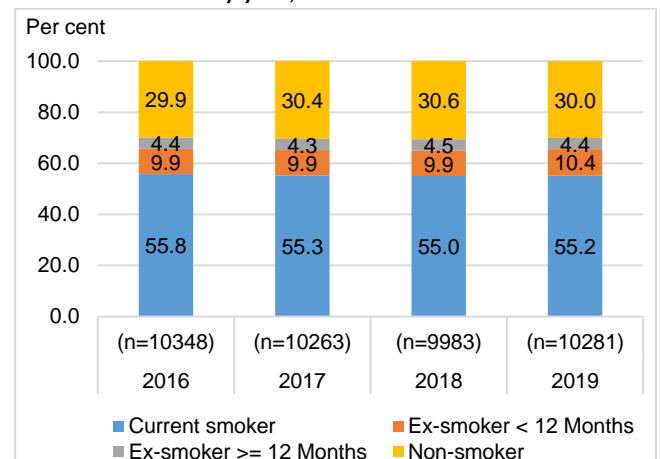
Figure 1 Smoking status, Aboriginal people aged 15 years and over, Northern Territory Government remote primary health care clinics by year, 2016-2019

Figure 2 Smoking status, Aboriginal people aged 15 years and over, Northern Territory Government remote primary health care clinics in the Top End by year, 2016–2019

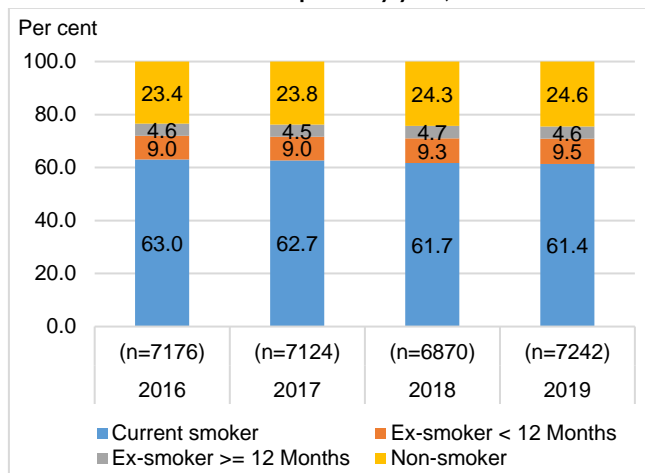
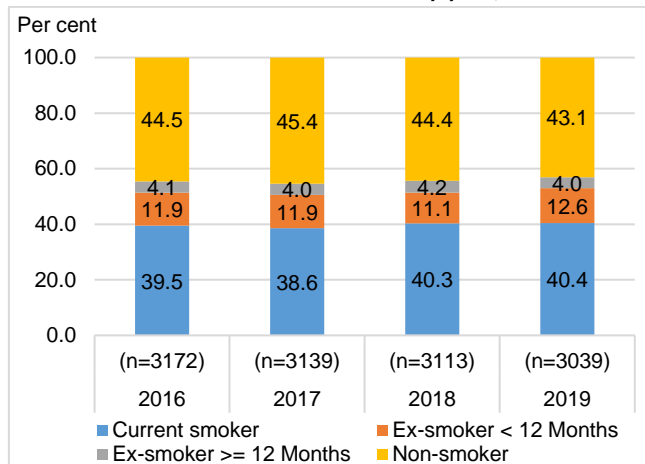


Figure 3 Smoking status, Aboriginal people aged 15 years and over, Northern Territory Government remote primary health care clinics in Central Australia by year, 2016–2019



Smoking during pregnancy

Addressing smoking during pregnancy is of particular importance since tobacco use harms both the mother and the fetus. Smoking during pregnancy is the most common preventable risk factor for pregnancy complications. Smoking during pregnancy is linked with worse perinatal outcomes, including low birth weight, being small for gestational age, preterm birth and perinatal death.¹⁰

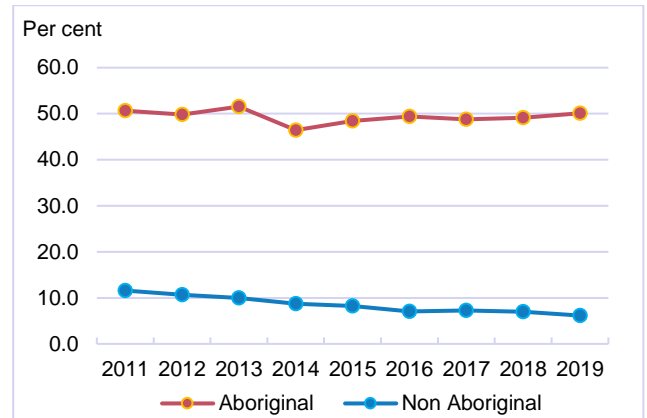
Figure 4 shows self-reported smoking status before 20 weeks gestation by Aboriginal status. These data were collected in the NT Midwives' Collection from 2011 to 2019.

Smoking rates decreased among non-Aboriginal pregnant women from 12% in 2011 to 6% in 2019;

however, the proportion among pregnant Aboriginal women remained around 50% with little overall change. This is consistent with the general trend of smoking prevalence among NT Aboriginal females.

Accordingly, the gap in smoking rates during this early stage of pregnancy between NT Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal mothers increased from four times higher for Aboriginal mothers in 2011 to eight times in 2019.

Figure 4 Self-reported smoking status before 20 weeks gestation by Aboriginal status, Northern Territory, 2011–2019



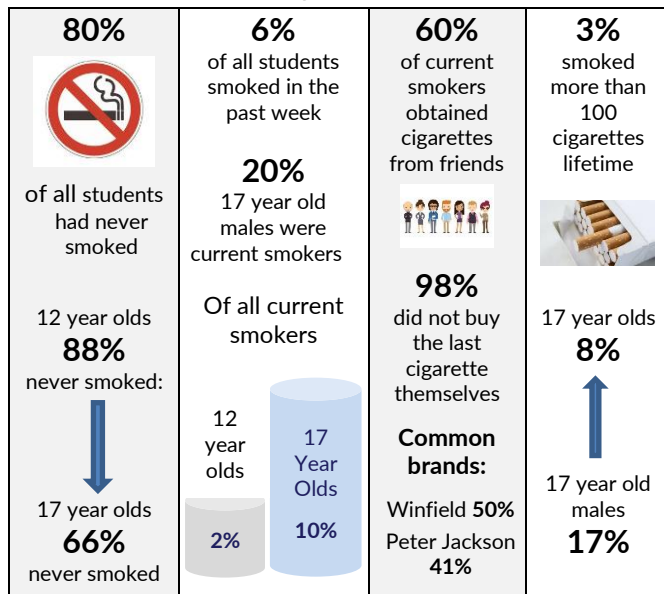
Smoking in secondary students

Diagram 1 presents selected tobacco results for NT from the 2014 Australian Secondary Students' Alcohol and Drug survey.¹¹

The target population was all students in years 7–12 aged between 12 and 17 across the NT. Participating schools were randomly selected from all government and non-government schools. In each of the school systems, every student had an equal chance of being surveyed. The survey took place over the course of the 2014 school year. Students from thirteen schools were included in the survey. A final sample of 633 students participated.

The diagram shows 80% of students had never smoked but this proportion declined with age, from 88% of 12 year olds to 66% of 17 year olds. Overall, 6% of students were current smokers. Being a current smoker was associated with age, with 2% of 12-year-olds being a current smoker compared to 10% of 17-year-olds. Among 17-year-old males, 20% were current smokers.

Diagram 1 Self-reported smoking status among secondary students, Northern Territory, 2014



60% of current smokers were given their last cigarette by a friend and most of the current smokers (98%) did not buy the last cigarette they had smoked. Winfield (50.2%) and Peter Jackson (41.2%) were the favourite brands across age and sex.

Overall, 3% of students had smoked 100 or more cigarettes in a lifetime. However, among all 17-year-olds, 8% reported having smoked more than 100 cigarettes in their lifetime with the proportion more than doubling (17%) among 17-year-old males.

Wholesale tobacco sales in the Northern Territory

Figure 5 presents the results of wholesale sale of tobacco products in the NT, as reported by tobacco manufacturers and major retailers.

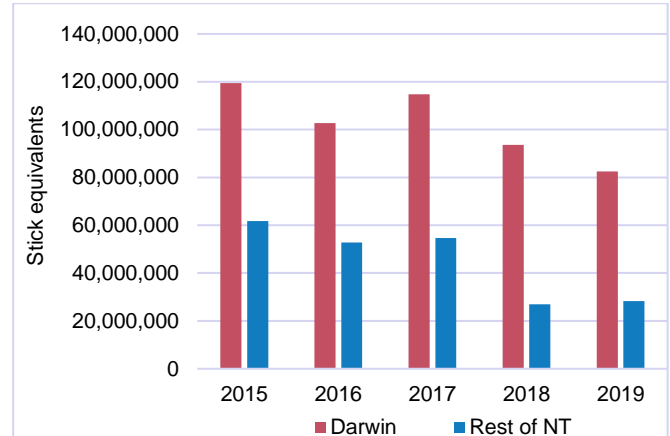
Tobacco is sold in a variety of products: cigarettes, pipe tobacco, roll-your-own (RYO) tobacco, cigars, cigarillos, etc. For this reporting, all forms are converted into a standard measure call “stick equivalents” or “cigarette equivalents”, where one stick equivalent contains 0.8 grams of tobacco. Results are reported by NT Tourism Region to account for tourist bed-nights.

While there have been some concerns about the completeness and quality of these data which have yet to be addressed, one study has demonstrated that the

wholesale data has particular usefulness in remote and hard-to-reach populations, such as remote NT Aboriginal communities.¹²

Figure 5 shows a marked decline in tobacco sales in the NT since 2015 which is consistent with trends in the rest of Australia.¹³ More recent data beyond 2019 are not yet available.

Figure 5 Wholesale sales of tobacco in stick equivalents by NT Tourism Region and year, 2015–2019



Source: Wholesale sale of tobacco products in the NT, unpublished data, NT Health.

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Population and Digital Health Fact Sheet,
May 2022