

media release

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New research shows nearly 40% of smokers have a mental illness – and it's costing them dearly

SANE Australia is calling for urgent action to introduce quit smoking programs and supports for people with a mental illness, following an Access Economics report, *Smoking and Mental Illness: Costs*, that shows people with a mental illness make up 38.3% of all smokers.

The report, commissioned by SANE Australia, found the total financial cost of smoking by people living with a mental illness is \$33 billion a year, including costs of treatment for related illnesses such as cancer and heart disease, as well as loss of productivity.

SANE Australia Executive Director Barbara Hocking says despite the fact smokers with a mental illness pay about \$2.8 billion every year in tobacco taxes, there is little evidence of equitable funding and few programs to help the large numbers who want to quit.

'Smoking is a huge physical and financial burden for people with a mental illness and our research has shown very clearly how much it's costing us to do nothing. While quit programs have successfully reduced smoking rates generally, people with a mental illness have been largely ignored – with a few notable exceptions - despite evidence they respond well to targeted campaigns,' Ms Hocking said.

'As more and more areas become smoke-free, it's now urgent to research, develop and fund specific quit programs and resources. We welcome Rudd's Labor Government's \$15 million commitment to the National Tobacco Strategy and call on all Australian governments, quit organisations, mental health services and relevant health agencies to implement SANE's recommendations.'

Kylie Griffin knows first-hand the difficulties of trying to quit smoking and deal with a mental illness.

'Like most, I think I have the willingness, but perhaps not the wellness to quit unsupported. People need help to quit when they are battling illness. Trying to deal with the pressure of quitting without backup means less chance of success,' Kylie said.

One of the consultants on the report, Professor David Castle from St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne, says the need is obvious.

'As clinicians we have a clear responsibility and must do more to improve the overall health of our patients', Professor Castle said.

**Barbara Hocking and Kylie Griffin are available for comment.
Contact SANE Australia Media Relations Manager Cathy Heycock on 0414 427 291.**

SANE Australia
The national mental health charity

SANE media contact
Cathy Heycock
03 9682 5933
0414 427 291
cathy.heycock@sane.org

SANE Helpline
Information and referral
on mental illness
1800 18 SANE (7263)
www.sane.org

Key findings of Smoking and Mental Illness: Costs

- Smoking is the greatest single risk for developing cancer, responsible for about one in every nine Australian deaths
- People with a mental illness make up 38.8% of all adult smokers
- Overall there are 1.27 million Australians with a mental illness who smoke
- The total cost of smoking by people with a mental illness is \$33 billion a year
- People with schizophrenia and bipolar disorder are more than three times more likely to smoke than other Australians
- People with a mental illness tend to smoke at least 16% more heavily than others
- People with a mental illness pay about \$2.8 billion every year in tobacco tax
- People with a mental illness consume at least 42% of all cigarettes sold in Australia.

What is being done – state by state snapshot based on each state's responses to a questionnaire from SANE that asked about each state's policies, funding and programs to help people living with a mental illness to quit

Nationally: while people living with a mental illness are acknowledged in some policy documents, no state has developed and resourced coordinated cessation supports and services for this group

QUIT organisations nationally: advisors are trained in understanding the specific needs of callers living with a mental illness. Some offer limited programs tailored for clients and staff of mental health services. Quit Victoria and Quit SA distribute South Australian Tobacco and Mental Illness Project booklets

Other activities

NSW: The Cancer Council's *Tobacco Control and Social Equity Strategy*, includes people living with a mental illness

QLD: Nicotine replacement therapies (NRTs) provided for inpatients only. Currently developing a chronic disease reduction project that will address the issue of smoking and mental illness

SA: The Tobacco and Mental Illness Project has provided tailored quit programs for clients of mental health services since 1998. The project has developed a specific strategy for mental health services due to be implemented

TAS: NRTs provided for inpatients. Ten-week 'Smokefree' courses are available through area health services bi-annually. *Strategy Area 5, Tailoring Initiatives for Disadvantaged Groups* outlines the provision of cessation services for smokers with a mental illness, but is yet to be implemented

VIC: The Victorian Tobacco Control Strategy to be launched in 2008, will address the prevalence of smoking amongst socioeconomically disadvantaged groups including people with a mental illness

WA: health facilities will go smoke-free as of 1 January 2008. NRTs provided for inpatients and also in limited quantity through some area health services

ACT and NT: Did not respond to the survey.

Recommendations:

- Specific programs be researched and developed for people with a mental illness who wish to quit
- Equitable resourcing and subsidising of quit programs and nicotine replacement therapies for those who want to stop smoking
- Promotion of targeted and active programs focused on dealing with the issues faced by people with a mental illness who want to quit but are unable to access adequate, long-term support
- Ongoing consultation with people with a mental illness and the mental health sector on ways to improve policies.

For more information, or to order SmokeFree/Healthy Living resources, visit www.sane.org For information about mental illness or referral to services in your area, phone the SANE Helpline, Australia's only national freecall mental illness helpline on 1800 18 SANE (7263).