

Driving progress further: Factors associated with never smoking tobacco among young Aboriginal people aged 16-24 years in the Next Generation Youth Wellbeing Study cohort

Tabassum Rahman¹, Christina Heris, Katiska Davis, Robyn Williams, Ted Fields, Simon Graham, Aryati Yashadhana, Emily Banks, Sandra Eades

¹*The University of Melbourne, Victoria, Australia*

Introduction and aims: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (hereafter Aboriginal) peoples drove a substantial reduction in adult daily tobacco smoking between 2004-2019. This Aboriginal-led study examines factors associated with never smoking tobacco among Aboriginal 16–24-year-olds participating in the Next Generation Youth Wellbeing Cohort Study.

Methods: Age- and sex-adjusted Poisson regression analysis estimated prevalence ratios (PR) and 95% confidence intervals (CI) using complete baseline data on the outcome of interest (N=474).

Results: Over 45% of the young Aboriginal people in this cohort never smoked tobacco, and 31.22% were current daily/weekly/monthly smokers. Those who had ever smoked started aged 15. Younger age (16-19 vs 20-24 years; PR 0.66; 95% CI 0.56-0.77), living in a major city versus regional/rural areas (0.80; 0.67-0.97) and completing versus not completing Year 10 (0.76; 0.65-0.90) were associated with never smoking. Experience of financial stress (1.31; 1.12-1.54) and racism (1.21; 1.00-1.47), ever smoking marijuana (3.31; 2.69-4.08) and e-cigarette use (2.34, 1.20-2.75) were associated with ever smoking tobacco, compared to not being exposed to these factors. Excellent/good versus poor/fair self-rated health (0.74, 0.63-0.88), low/moderate versus high psychological distress (0.74; 0.63-0.87), and never versus ever being diagnosed with depression (0.73; 0.62-0.87) or anxiety (0.69; 0.58-0.81) were associated with never smoking. Over 71% of the current smokers tried to quit and/or reduce smoking in the past year.

Discussion and conclusion: Coordinated effort to prevent smoking initiation and exposure to other substances that are often used concurrently may help in further reducing the daily smoking prevalence among Aboriginal peoples by stopping young Aboriginal people from starting to use tobacco.

Implications for policy: Accelerated tobacco control is required to avoid new generations of smokers, with an increased focus on culturally appropriate strengths-based population, community and individual initiatives targeting Aboriginal youth at a health behaviour formation stage, to prevent initiation and support cessation.