

Welcome to the sixth edition of *Tobacco Facts for MPs*, a regular newsletter to highlight the latest in tobacco legislation, research and litigation.

## Focus

Smoking is a major threat to women and girls, undermining their health, fertility and family life.



Congratulations to the NSW Health Department for coordinating the development of a comprehensive NSW Tobacco Action Plan for 2000-2004. Jointly produced with health groups and Area Health Services, the goal is to reduce smoking rates to 15% by 2005. Successful implementation, however, is dependent upon the support of the Carr Government in fully funding the plan in the April 2000 Budget.



Thumbs down to the tobacco industry for targeting women through their promotion of smoking and product placement in films (<http://www.nswcc.org.au/pages/tobacco/movies.htm>), on the catwalk and in fashion magazines. Despite all the evidence and warnings, editors of youth magazines, such as, *Rolling Stone*, *Juice* and *Ralph* continue to portray smoking as a cool and desirable image for young women (see "*Ralph*" August 1999 edition below).



## Smoking major killer of women

- In one year alone 1,800 females in NSW died of diseases caused by smoking; 486 deaths from lung cancer and 397 deaths from ischaemic heart disease (1994/95). In the same period, 15,650 hospital bed days were attributable to female smoking in NSW (excluding passive smoking).
- Cigarette smoking causes around 20% of deaths of women (before the age of 65).

## Smoking on rise with girls

- Among NSW secondary school students, the prevalence of smoking has increased since 1990. More girls are smoking than boys, and on average smoking as much as 20 cigarettes per week.
- Over 107,000 students smoke cigarettes illegally supplied and worth an estimated \$32m.

(Source: *The 1994 and 1996 Australian School Students' Alcohol and Drugs Survey* by NSW Health and NSW Cancer Council)

## Future trend looks bleak

Although men currently smoke more than women, they are also quitting much faster, and by 2003 more women are expected to be smoking than men. In NSW about 22% of female's smoke, although the rate is much higher in younger age groups, with 33% of women aged 20-24 years smoking. (Source: *NSW Health Survey 1997 Current Smoking including occasional and daily smokers*) [www.healthnsw.gov.au/public-health/hs97/smkm\\_sm1.htm](http://www.healthnsw.gov.au/public-health/hs97/smkm_sm1.htm)

## Women at more risk than men

Between the mid 1970s and 1996, lung cancer incidence rates doubled in women and fell by 18% in men. Over the same period, deaths from lung cancer rose by 94% in women and fell by 23% in men. (Source: *Coates M and Armstrong B. Cancer in New South Wales Incidence and Mortality 1996*) <http://www.nswcc.org.au/pages/ccic/ccr/1996stat/stats.htm>

Scientists have also recently discovered that a gene for a protein that fuels lung cancer growth is more active in women than men. It was found that tobacco carcinogens affect women differently with women being more "efficient at metabolising the substances and turning them into harmful substances in the body". *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*, 21 April 1999.

## Light smoker at risk of heart attack

A new study of women between 16 and 44 years found that women who smoke one pack or more a day, were 25 times more at risk of heart attack than non-smokers. Even light smokers who had up to five cigarettes a day had double the risk of a non-smoker. (Source: *Dunn NR et al. Risk of myocardial infarction in young female smokers. Heart. 1999; 82:581-583*) <http://heart.bmjournals.com/cgi/content/abstract/82/5/581>

# Tobacco Facts for MPs

### Comment

In the 1970's Australian women were congratulated by the Phillip Morris company with the infamous Virginia Slims advertisement "You've come a long way baby" and we have....

- More girls are smoking than boys.
- Lung cancer will soon surpass breast cancer as the leading cause of cancer death amongst women.
- 40% of coronary heart disease deaths among women younger than 65 are caused by smoking.
- 50% of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander women are smokers.

Smoking is not only a critical health issue it is a major equity issue. Girls and very young women, women of lower social-economic status and Aboriginal women have particularly high smoking rates – and we know that 50% of all long term smokers will die from tobacco related causes.

As a member of the NSW Parliament you can take a significant step toward addressing this key health equity issue by urging the NSW Government to commit to fully funding the Tobacco Action Plan 2000-2004 in the April 2000 Budget.

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### No significant decline in rate of pregnant women smoking

It is well established that smoking during pregnancy affects the health of unborn babies, including greater risk of miscarriage, complications during the birth and low birth weight. The proportion of mothers in NSW reporting smoking during pregnancy has varied little from 1994 (22.1%) to 1997 (20.6%). Only 3% stopped smoking in the second half of their pregnancy and about 50% smoked more than 10 cigarettes per day.

*(Source: NSW Health Department. 1997 Mothers and Babies Report)*

<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/public-health/mdc97/index/html>

### Philip Morris chairman claimed women prefer 'smaller babies'

A former Chairman of the Philip Morris Inc Board, Joseph Cullman, was asked on CBS "Face the Nation" if he was aware of a massive UK study of 17,000 pregnant women and their newborns. The study showed that babies of smoking mothers had a greater incidence of low birth weight, an increased risk of stillbirth and infant death within 28 days of birth, than babies of non smoking mothers. Cullman said he was aware of the study and its results. His response was, "Some women would prefer having smaller babies."

<http://www.pmdocs.com/getallimg.asp?DOCID=1005081714/1732>>

### Tobacco Industry targets women

Cigarettes were one of the most advertised products in women's magazines prior to advertising bans in 1990. Smoking was inextricably linked with style, sex appeal, social distinction and professional success. Women's brands are still typically 'milder', 'lighter', mentholated or slimmer in smaller packs. According to a trade journal,

"The Holiday 20s variant... was launched in July 1997 and was successful in meeting the needs of adult convenience store shoppers and females who smoke. It is the smallest pack size and lowest price on the market" (*Retail World*, November 8, 1999)

### Hot Documents

#### "Women's Rights" exploited by tobacco company

Philip Morris (Australia) discussed the success of brands like Virginia Slims in capitalising on the new freedom and lifestyle for women:

"...Likewise I suspect that part of the success of our Virginia Slims advertising based on the theme 'you've come a long way baby', is tapping in to the emotional content of the whole women's rights problem"

<http://www.pmdocs.com/getallimg.asp?DOCID=1002385000/5023>

#### Fashion industry to promote smoking

A previously secret Australian document from WD&HO Wills recommends:

"Active encouragement of well known personalities who smoke, to speak up in support of the benefits and pleasure they derive from smoking".

"Establish closer association with fashion houses, shops, models and fashion parades and encourage their use openly of our products"

<http://www.pmdocs.com/getallimg.asp?DOCID=2025025461/5480>

#### "Charlie" brand aimed at poor and disadvantaged women

Philip Morris discussed a super-value product code named "Charlie" timed for a launch in Australia in 1992:

"The target market is older, more female, and from lower socio-economic backgrounds. These consumers, with low price as the major motivator tend to purchase heavily from grocery stores and discounters where carton prices are heavily price reduced on a regular basis".

<http://www.pmdocs.com/getallimg.asp?DOCID=2504107198/7218>

### Parliamentary Questions Service

If you would like assistance with a tobacco-related question please contact ASH on 02 93341876

Visit [www.ashaust.org.au](http://www.ashaust.org.au) for copies of newsletters, links to references, tobacco industry documents, fact sheets, media releases, tobacco and health policies and links to international, national and state organisations committed to tobacco control.

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