

2.17 Tobacco use

The proportion of Indigenous Australians who are current regular smokers

Data sources

Data for this indicator come from the 2004–05 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (NATSIHS) and 2004 National Drug Strategy Household Survey.

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (NATSIHS)

The 2004–05 NATSIHS collected information from 10,439 Indigenous Australians of all ages. This sample was considerably larger than the supplementary Indigenous samples in the 1995 and 2001 National Health Surveys. The survey was conducted in remote and non-remote areas of Australia and collected a range of information from Indigenous Australians about health-related issues including health-related actions, health risk factors, health status, socioeconomic circumstances and women's health. It is planned to repeat the NATSIHS at six-yearly intervals, with the next NATSIHS to be conducted in 2010–11. Selected non-Indigenous comparisons are available through the 2004–05 National Health Survey (NHS).

National Drug Strategy Household Survey

The National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS) is conducted by the AIHW every three years and collects information relating to drug use in Australia. The sample size for the 2004 survey was 29,445 persons aged 12 years or older.

The NDSHS does not have an enhanced Indigenous sample. Therefore, only a small number of Indigenous respondents are picked up in this survey. In 2004, approximately 150 Indigenous respondents were included. The sample size for Indigenous Australians is very small and therefore the estimates should be interpreted with caution (ABS & AIHW 2005). This small Indigenous sample size would also limit the reliability of time series analysis.

NDSHS data are reportable by the national level only. Data are not available for remoteness areas, regional areas and state and territory levels.

Data analyses

Smoking status

- In 2004–05, approximately 46% of Indigenous Australians aged 18 years and over reported they were current daily smokers compared to 21% of non-Indigenous Australians. Around 24% of Indigenous adults were ex-smokers compared to 30% of non-Indigenous adults.

Smoking status by age group and sex

- A higher proportion of Indigenous and non-Indigenous males were current daily smokers (48% and 24% respectively) than Indigenous and non-Indigenous females (45% and 18% respectively) (Table 2.17.1).
- Indigenous adults aged 25–34 and 35–44 years were most likely to report being current daily smokers (55%). The lowest proportion of Indigenous adults who were current daily smokers were aged 55 years and over (30%).

Table 2.17.1: Smoker status, by Indigenous status, sex and age group, 2004–05

Smoker status	18–24		25–34		35–44		45–54		55 and over		Total		Total age standardised ^(a)	
	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.
(per cent)														
Males														
Current smoker														
Daily	50	29	56	29	57	29	50	25	35	14	51	24	48	24
Other	3 ^(c)	4	1 ^(c)	3	2 ^(c)	2	2 ^(c)	2	1 ^(d)	1 ^(c)	2	2	2	2
Ex-smoker	13	13	15	24	15	28	30	37	43	55	20	35	26	35
Never smoked	34	54	28	43	25	41	19	36	21	30	26	39	24	39
Total number^(a)	26,714	939,483	32,574	1,368,120	27,186	1,439,208	18,812	1,340,599	15,193	2,170,272	139,595	7,666,352	139,595	7,666,352
Females														
Current smoker														
Daily	51	23	54	23	54	23	51	20	26	9	49	18	45	18
Other	1 ^(c)	2 ^(c)	1 ^(c)	3	5 ^(c)	2	1 ^(d)	1 ^(c)	1 ^(c)	1	2 ^(c)	2	2 ^(c)	2
Ex-smoker	12	14	18	24	19	25	19	29	33	29	19	25	22	25
Never smoked	36	62	27	50	22	50	29	50	40	62	30	55	31	55
Total number^(b)	30,009	917,595	37,198	1,393,234	31,871	1,460,358	20,766	1,364,981	17,974	2,359,406	154,046	7,866,025	154,046	7,866,025
Persons														
Current smoker														
Daily	50	26	55	26	55	26	50	22	30	12	49	21	46	21
Other	2 ^(c)	3	1	3	4 ^(c)	2	1 ^(c)	2	1 ^(c)	1	2 ^(c)	2	2	2
Ex-smoker	12	13	16	24	17	27	24	33	37	41	19	30	24	30
Never smoked	35	58	28	47	24	45	24	43	32	46	30	47	28	47
Total number^(b)	56,723	1,857,078	69,772	2,761,354	59,057	2,899,566	39,578	2,705,580	33,167	4,529,678	293,641	15,532,377	293,641	15,532,377

(a) Directly age-standardised proportions.

(b) Includes 'smoker status' not known.

(c) Estimate has a relative standard error of 25% to 50% and should be used with caution.

(d) Estimate has a relative standard error of greater than 50% and is considered too unreliable for general use.

Source: ABS 2006.

Smoking status by state/territory

- In 2004–05, the proportion of Indigenous persons aged 18 years and over who were current smokers ranged from 44% in the Australian Capital Territory to 56% in South Australia and the Northern Territory (Table 2.17.2).
- The proportion of Indigenous ex-smokers in 2004–05 ranged from 14% in the Northern Territory to 24% in Victoria.
- The proportion of Indigenous adults who reported that they had never smoked was similar across most states and territories.

Table 2.17.2: Smoker status, by state/territory, Indigenous persons aged 18 years and over, 2004–05

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Aust.
	(per cent)								
Current smoker	53	52	51	48	56	51	44	56	52
Daily	51	50	50	44	53	50	41	54	50
Other	2 ^(b)	2 ^(b)	1 ^(b)	4 ^(b)	3 ^(b)	1 ^(b)	3 ^(c)	2	2
Ex-smoker	20	24	20	22	17	22	25	14	20
Never smoked	27	24	29	30	27	27	31	30	28
Total^(a)	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total number	75,000	16,500	70,600	36,500	14,500	9,500	2,300	33,400	258,300

(a) Includes smoking status 'unknown'.

(b) Estimate has a relative standard error of between 25% and 50% and should be used with caution.

(c) Estimate has a relative standard error greater than 50% and is considered too unreliable for general use.

Source: ABS and AIHW analysis of 2004–05 NATSIHS.

Smoking status by remoteness

Table 2.17.3 presents the smoking status of Indigenous and non-Indigenous adults by remoteness area for 2004–05.

- In 2004–05, the proportion of Indigenous adults who reported they were current smokers was similar across all remoteness areas.
- The rate ratio of Indigenous to non-Indigenous current smokers was higher in major cities (2.1) than in remote areas of Australia (1.4). This is because while the proportion of Indigenous adults who smoked was similar, the proportion of non-Indigenous Australians who reported they were current smokers was higher in remote areas (34%) than in major cities (22%).

Table 2.17.3: Smoker status, by remoteness area and Indigenous status, persons aged 18 years and over, 2004–05

Smoker status	Major cities			Inner regional			Outer regional			Remote			Very remote ^(a)			Australia		
	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Rate ratio	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Rate ratio	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Rate ratio	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Rate ratio	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Rate ratio	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Rate ratio
	(per cent)																	
Current smoker	46	22	2.1*	47	26	1.8*	50	27	1.9*	47	34	1.4*	51	n.a.	—	48	23	2.1*
Daily	45	20	2.3*	46	24	1.9*	48	25	1.9*	45	32	1.4*	48	n.a.	—	46	21	2.2*
Other	2 ^(d)	2	0.9	1 ^(c)	2	0.6	2 ^(c)	2	1.0	2 ^(c)	2 ^(c)	1.4	3 ^(c)	n.a.	—	2	2	1.0
Ex-smoker	27	30	0.9	25	31	0.8*	22	31	0.7*	25	27	0.9	18	n.a.	—	24	30	0.8*
Never smoked	26	49	0.5*	28	44	0.6*	29	42	0.7*	28	40	0.7*	31	n.a.	—	28	47	0.6*
Total^(b)	100.0	100.0	..	100.0	100.0	..	100.0	100.0	..	100.0	100.0	..	100.0	n.a.	..	100.0	100.0	..

* Represents statistically significant differences in the Indigenous/ non-Indigenous comparisons.

(a) The National Health Survey did not collect data in very remote Australia.

(b) Includes smoking status 'unknown'.

(c) Estimate is subject to sampling variability too high for most practical purposes.

(d) Estimate has a relative standard error greater than 50% and is considered too unreliable for general use.

Note: Data are age standardised.

Source: ABS and AIHW analysis of 2004–05 NATSIHS and 2004–05 National Health Survey.

Smoking status over time

- The proportion of Indigenous adults who reported they were current smokers was similar in 2001 and 2004–05 (51% and 48%) (Table 2.17.4).
- The rate ratio of Indigenous to non-Indigenous smokers, ex-smokers and non-smokers was also similar in 2001 and 2004–05.
- Data on the smoking status of Indigenous Australians were collected in the 1995 National Health Survey, however they are available for non-remote areas only. The proportion of Indigenous adults in non-remote areas who reported they were current daily smokers was similar in 1995, 2001 and 2004–05 (50%, 48% and 49% respectively) (ABS 2006).

Table 2.17.4: Smoker status, by Indigenous status, persons aged 18 years and over, 2001 and 2004–05

	2001			2004–05		
	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Rate ratio	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Rate ratio
	(per cent)					
Current smoker	51	24	2.1*	48	23	2.1*
Daily	49	22	2.2*	46	21	2.2*
Other	2 ^(a)	2	1.2	2	2	1.0
Ex-smoker	21	26	0.8*	24	30	0.8*
Never smoked	28	50	0.6*	28	47	0.6*
Not known	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total	100.0	100.0	..	100.0	100.0	..

* Represents statistically significant differences in the Indigenous/non-Indigenous comparisons.

(a) Estimate has a relative standard error of between 25% and 50% and should be used with caution.

Note: Data are age standardised.

Source: ABS & AIHW analysis of 2001 National Health Survey (Indigenous supplement), 2004–05 NATSIHS and 2004–05 National Health Survey.

Additional information

Smoking status among those aged 12 years and over

The 2004 National Drug Strategy Household Survey collected information on smoking status of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians aged 12 years and over.

- In 2004 approximately 52% of Indigenous people aged 12 years and over had smoked 100 cigarettes in their lifetime (or equivalent amount of tobacco), and 35% had smoked in the last 12 months. This contrasted with other Australians, 45% of whom had smoked at least 100 cigarettes in their lifetime, and 20% of whom had smoked in the last 12 months (AIHW 2005).

These data should be interpreted with caution as the sample size for Indigenous Australians was very small (463).

Data quality issues

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (NATSIHS)

The NATSIHS uses the standard Indigenous status question. The NATSIHS sample was specifically designed to select a representative sample of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and thus overcomes the problem inherent in most national surveys with small and unrepresentative Indigenous samples. As with other surveys, the NATSIHS is subject to sampling and non-sampling errors. Calculations of standard errors and significance testing help to identify the accuracy of the estimates and differences.

Information recorded in this survey is essentially 'as reported' by respondents. The ABS makes every effort to collect accurate information from respondents, particularly through careful questionnaire design, pre-testing of questionnaires, use of trained interviewers and assistance from Indigenous facilitators. Nevertheless, some responses may be affected by imperfect recall or individual interpretation of survey questions.

Non-Indigenous comparisons are available through the National Health Survey (NHS). The NHS was conducted in major cities, regional and remote areas, but very remote areas were excluded from the sample. Time series comparisons are available through the 1995 and 2001 National Health Survey.

In remote communities there were some modifications to the NATSIHS content in order to address language and cultural appropriateness in traditional communities, as well as to assist respondents in understanding the concepts. Some questions were excluded and some reworded. Also, paper forms were used in communities in remote areas and computer-assisted interview (CAI) instruments were used in non-remote areas. The CAI process included built in edit checks and sequencing.

Further information on NATSIHS data quality issues can be found in the national publication (ABS 2006).

Smoking data

The survey addresses smoking status, commencement age of tobacco use, Indigenous status, age and sex. The NATSIHS has a large Indigenous sample size resulting in reliable estimates.

The question on smoking is asked of persons aged 18 years and over. As most Australians commence smoking before the age of 18 years, this limits our understanding of teenage smoking patterns. Teenagers are one of the primary target groups for smoking prevention programs.

National Drug Strategy Household Survey

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Smoking data

The survey addresses smoking status, age of commencement of tobacco use, sex, and age. The survey collects data from persons aged 12 years and older (with parent/guardian consent). This age group is one of the primary areas for targeting reductions in the uptake of smoking tobacco.

References

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 2006. National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey 2004–05. ABS cat. no. 4715.0. Canberra: ABS.

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AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) 2005. Statistics on drug use in Australia 2004. Drug Statistics Series no. 15. AIHW cat. no. PHE 62. Canberra: AIHW.