



MEDIA RELEASE

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30 years of Quit saves half a million Victorians

Smoking was so common when Quit Victoria was established 30 years ago that people would light up on aeroplanes, inside restaurants, at their desks at work and even in hospitals.

Tobacco advertising could be seen in newspapers, at the cinema and on billboards, featuring healthy young actors smiling with friends as they enjoyed a cigarette. In fact, Melbourne television viewers saw – on average – one advertisement for cigarettes every eight minutes.

A small printed warning on tobacco packs stated that smoking was a health hazard, although this was vigorously denied by the tobacco industry.

Quit Victoria's work has helped turn the tide – and its sustained efforts to encourage smokers to quit and deter others from taking up the habit have delivered results.

In 1985, 32 per cent of Victorians were regular smokers. By 2012, this had fallen by more than half, with just 13 per cent of Victorians smoking regularly.ⁱ

On the organisation's 30th birthday, Quit Victoria Director Dr Sarah White said it was frightening to imagine a Victoria in which smoking rates remained unchanged.

"If we hadn't achieved this reduction, and our smoking rate remained at 32 per cent, we would have seen a whopping 1.4 million regular smokers in Victoria in 2012," Dr White said.

"There are more than 800,000 Victorians who are not smoking today, which means more than half a million Victorians have or will be saved from premature death thanks to Quit Victoria's work and the leadership of VicHealth, Cancer Council Victoria and federal and state governments."ⁱⁱ

Cancer Council Victoria chief executive Todd Harper said anti-smoking advertisements, smokefree areas and increased cigarette prices were vital to the success of anti-smoking campaigns.

"We know that these are the key measures that motivate smokers to quit and discourage young people from taking up the habit," Mr Harper said.

"As we reflect on how far we've come, young Victorians might be shocked to know that you once came home from the pub with your clothes reeking of smoke, or were likely to find yourself breathing in someone else's second-hand smoke on a bus."

Minister for Health Jill Hennessy congratulated Quit Victoria on its 30 years of success.

"Quit has been - and continues to be - a strong voice in the campaign against smoking."

"I look forward to working with Quit Victoria and the Cancer Council to identify what more can be done to reduce the harm caused by smoking," Ms Hennessy said.

Dr White said that although Victoria has come a long way in reducing the harms caused by smoking, it remained the state's leading cause of preventable disease and death, killing about 4500 Victorians in 2013.

"Quit and the Cancer Council Victoria have enjoyed broad political support for tobacco control over 30 years because our politicians – no matter their era or their party – recognise both the tragedy of the human toll and the incredible cost to Victoria's economy.

"Smoking still kills 11 Victorians every day, and for every death it's estimated there are another 30 people being treated for a smoking-related illness. More than 4000 Victorian teenagers are still taking up smoking every year.

To celebrate Quit Victoria's 30th birthday, we've dug into the archives and found some of our favourite television campaigns.

Among the highlights:

- Pat Cash told us in a 1988 advertisement that he had a few tennis tips - "but I'll give you one tip that I reckon's the best of the lot – don't smoke";
- John Clarke, moonlighting as "head honcho" of a tobacco company in 2002, announced a product recall over health concerns linked to his product – before breaking into raucous laughter;
- Footballer Paul Roos, then with Fitzroy, told us in the "winners" advertisement in 1988: "I don't smoke – it's the only way to stay ahead of the game".

Quit Victoria is currently running the '16 cancers' campaign, highlighting the fact that smoking causes a range of cancers which can have a devastating impact on the daily life of individuals and their families.

For help to quit smoking, contact Quitline on 13 7848 or go to www.quit.org.au. Cancer information and support is available on 13 11 20 or at www.cancervic.org.au

ⁱ Cancer Council Victoria's Behavioural Science Division. Regular smokers = people who smoked daily or weekly.

ⁱⁱ Cancer Council Victoria's Behavioural Science Division. In 2012, about 578,000 Victorians smoked regularly. Tobacco smoking and all-cause mortality in a large Australian cohort study: findings from a mature epidemic with current low smoking prevalence, Banks et al, *BMC Medicine* 2015, Volume 13