

Kicking the habit – more people quit smoking than ever before

Smoking rates across the Hunter, Lower Mid North Coast and New England regions continue to decline according to new data. The data is from a series of surveys undertaken by NSW Health over the past 10 years.

The number of people smoking has declined steadily from 1997 to 2007. In 1997, slightly more than one in four residents aged 16 and older were smokers (25.5 per cent). In 2007 the rate declined to 16.6 per cent.

In absolute terms, this means that a substantial number of adults have been giving up cigarette smoking in the region. In 1997, about 160,000 people smoked cigarettes. This has now dropped to 112,000 adult smokers in 2007.

This equates to 48,000 fewer smokers across the Hunter New England Health region.

In the main, more men continue to smoke cigarettes compared with women. In 1997, the proportion of adult men smoking cigarettes was 27.1 per cent compared with 23.9 per cent for women. In 2007, the NSW Health Survey reported that 14.3 per cent of men and 18.7 per cent of women were smokers.

Smoke-free Program Manager Jenny Knight said that tobacco smoking is a major risk factor for several diseases, including heart disease, stroke, lung cancer and chronic lung disease, and is the largest single preventable cause of premature mortality and illness.

“Of the 6,990 people who died in Hunter New England Health region in 2005, nearly one in seven was due to smoking. This means that on average at least one person dies every ten hours due to tobacco smoking in the region. Many of these deaths occur prematurely.”

“In addition, tobacco smoking is very costly on our health system. In 2005, tobacco smoking accounted for more than 7,000 hospital admissions across the Hunter, New England and Lower Mid North Coast regions,” Ms Knight said.

“The increasing tendency of people giving up is resulting in some gains. Death from lung cancer, heart disease, strokes are also all showing signs of declining.”

“Although the reduction in these diseases cannot all be attributed to the reduction in smoking, there is no doubt that people choosing to give up has been a major factor in these gains,” she said.

“It is a continuing struggle and much remains to be done. To show that we practice what we preach smoking is no longer allowed on any HNE Health sites. We hope that other large employers will follow suit, and reap the benefits of a healthier workforce.”