

Media Release – 18 October, 2018

Australians call for policy change to tackle youth smoking

The majority of voters in four Australian states want the legal age for purchasing cigarettes to be raised to 21 years old, according to new polling commissioned by Minderoo Foundation's Eliminate Cancer Initiative.

A poll of 3,757 voters across New South Wales, Victoria, Western Australia and Tasmania found more than 7 in 10 voters in each state supported the simple but life-saving policy.

The findings reinforce the results of earlier polling in South Australia and Queensland and further demonstrate the broad support for an increase in the cigarette purchasing age across the country.

"Smoking kills 15,000 Australians every year¹," Eliminate Cancer Initiative Chief Operating Officer Bruce Mansfield said.

"We are calling on all State and Territory governments to lift the age people can purchase cigarettes to 21 to protect young Australians from the harm caused by life-long tobacco addictions. This new polling clearly demonstrates the proposed policy shift has public support in every state.

"Australia has been a world-leader in tobacco control. We must continue to implement innovative policies to prevent vulnerable young Australians from taking up smoking, drive down smoking rates and ultimately prevent thousands of premature deaths.

"Introducing T21 is a proven tobacco control innovation that has worked in other jurisdictions and should be introduced across Australia."

The level of support for raising the minimum age for buying cigarettes to 21 years was found to be:

- New South Wales – 81% of voters
- Victoria – 79% of voters
- Western Australia – 81% of voters
- Tasmania – 73% of voters

Previous polling in a selection of state seats in South Australia and Queensland found 76% and 81% of voters supported the tobacco prevention policy respectively.

The policy has been put to the COAG Health Council for consideration and is currently being reviewed by the Tasmanian Parliament, in the form of the Public Health Amendment (Prevention of Sale of Smoking Products to Under-Age Persons) Bill 2018.

"We know that almost 95 per cent of adult smokers started smoking before they turned 21²," Mr Mansfield continued.

"Raising the minimum age for buying cigarettes from 18 to 21 years will protect young Aussies from peer pressure at a time in their lives when they are especially vulnerable to addictive products such as cigarettes."
ENDS.

Media contact: Tess Ingram tingram@minderoo.com.au +61 448 922 364
Bruce Mansfield is available for interview today.

¹ Collins D, Lapsley H. The costs of tobacco, alcohol and illicit drug abuse to Australian society in 2004–05. Canberra: Department of Health and Ageing;2008.

² Institute of Medicine, Public Health Implications of Raising the Minimum Age of Legal Access to Tobacco Products (The National Academies Press, 2015) 43 <https://www.nap.edu/read/18997/chapter/4#43>