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**NRL legend, Johnathan Thurston, spearheads new campaign to stop young  
australians becoming lifelong customers of big tobacco**

Australia's leading rugby player and Queensland's Australian of the Year, Mr Johnathan Thurston, today spearheaded a multi-pronged media campaign, aimed at preventing young Australians from becoming addicted to smoking.

The campaign to run on television, radio, newspapers and social media: 'Stop Smoking Before it Starts' was filmed with Mr Thurston and a group of young players in Townsville.

There was a clear message for Queensland political parties to make a pre-election commitment to raise the age of tobacco purchase from 18 to 21.

"The driving force, behind me being part of this campaign, is that I have three young daughters and I want all state governments to take the initiative and raise the age of when we can buy cigarettes from the age of 18 to 21," Mr Thurston said. "I'm hopeful that when my kids grow older they won't ever have to be around smoking. "

The multi-media campaign is being spearheaded by the Minderoo Foundation and its the Eliminate Cancer Initiative (ECI), established by leading philanthropists, Andrew and Nicola Forrest, who have contributed an initial \$75 million injection of seed funding.

That initial capital is being leveraged to reward collaboration across the global cancer community and to accelerate research breakthroughs and improve prevention, detection and treatment including access to lifesaving clinical trials.

One of the biggest causes of preventable cancer is smoking. ECI's first mission is to put an end to the extreme, and unnecessary suffering and death caused by smoking. It is calling on State and Territory Governments to stop young people from legally accessing tobacco products until they are at least 21.

"We know that 90% of adult smokers start before 21. By the time they reach 21, they are hooked, " Mr Forrest said. "We know that if we can stop them smoking until then, they are unlikely to ever smoke."

A staggering 15,000 Australians die each year from smoking-related illnesses.<sup>1</sup> To put this into context that is twice as many Australians lost in the battle of Gallipoli.<sup>2</sup>

Mr Forrest said the economic and health cost to Australian taxpayers was immoral, with a \$31.5 billion hit to the nation every year.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.health.gov.au/tobacco>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/gallipoli>

<sup>3</sup> Department of Health, Australian Government, *Tobacco Control Key Facts and Figures* (4 October 2017)  
<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/publications/publishing.nsf/Content/tobacco-control-toc>



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“When you consider that taxpayers only get back \$10 billion in taxes from big tobacco, that is a \$20 billion loss every year.<sup>4</sup> That could build 20 state-of-the-art hospitals each year.<sup>5</sup>”

Mr Forrest said his Minderoo Foundation was proud to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with a great Australian, such as Johnathan Thurston, who wanted a better, healthier future for Australian children.

“Johnathan is an incredible role model. We want, and need, our politicians, particularly those in Queensland, to listen to him and stand up for the health and wellbeing of our young people.

Mr Thurston said when he was a teenager, a lot of his friends started to smoke and now they are ‘hooked for life’.

“We owe it to our kids, to keep them healthy by keeping them away from cigarettes,” Mr Thurston said. ENDS

**For media inquiries:**

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*(Please note: neither Mr Thurston nor Mr Forrest will be available today for interviews.)*

*Director of Eliminate Cancer Initiative and Director of the Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre, Professor Grant McArthur and the Chief Operating Officer of the ECI, Mr Bruce Mansfield will be available for interviews. Professor McArthur is based in Melbourne and Mr Mansfield is based in Sydney. They will be available from 10am to 12 noon AEDST.*

*The radio, print and television & social campaign, ‘Stop Smoking Before It Starts’, can be viewed and downloaded, at the website [stopsmokingbeforeitstarts.org.au](http://stopsmokingbeforeitstarts.org.au).*

*A short television interview of Johnathan Thurston is also available from this site. There is also a B-roll available of Mr Thurston playing rugby with children in Townsville.*

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<sup>4</sup> Treasurer and Minister for Finance, Australian Government, *Final Budget Outcome 2016-17* (September 2017) Australian Government General Government Sector (Cash) Receipts, p. 5 <http://www.budget.gov.au/2016-17/content/fbo/download/FBO-2016-17.pdf#page=13>

<sup>5</sup> Brookfield Multiplex, *Fiona Stanley Hospital Australian Construction Achievement Awards: Technical Paper* (December 2013) p. 2 <http://www.aaa.net.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Fiona-Stanley-Hospital-in-Perth.pdf>