

Media Release

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Smoke-free ground swell increasing

The 2011 results of the Heart Foundation's smoke-free policy survey reveal that almost 60 per cent of NSW Councils have implemented policy to restrict tobacco use in outdoor areas.

"89 councils have taken positive steps to protect their residents from the harmful effects of second-hand smoke with the introduction of smoke-free policy which cover a range of areas including parks, alfresco dining, sporting fields and playgrounds", said Tony Thirlwell, Heart Foundation CEO - NSW.

"The lack of uniformity means there is a patchwork effect that now mars our state and needs to be rectified immediately so that it is clear for people to know where they will be protected from the harmful fumes of cigarette smoke as they travel between council areas.

"We urgently need state-wide legislation to ensure we have a consistent approach right across NSW that reduces exposure to toxic cigarette smoke.

As of 30 June 2011, 89 of the 152 NSW councils have adopted some form of smoke-free outdoor areas policy, including 86% of Sydney metropolitan councils and almost 50% of regional/rural councils. Twenty-eight councils had policy in 2007.

According to an independent *Newspoll survey** commissioned by the Heart Foundation and Cancer Council in February this year, more than eight out of ten NSW voters believe smoking should be banned from outdoor areas where food or drink is served.

"There is strong public support for smoke-free outdoor areas – for example 83 per cent NSW voters believe smoking should be banned from outdoor areas where food or drink is served.

"Contrary to tobacco industry scare tactics, it's also what eight out of ten** café and restaurant owners want, believing state-wide legislation is fairer than leaving it to local councils. Piece this together and we have strong public and business support for a very achievable policy to protect everybody equally."

The Heart Foundation is urging the NSW Government to respond to strong public support and release the 2011-2015 Tobacco Action Plan and introduce legislation making crowded outdoor areas and those frequented by children, smoke-free.

"If Government had any concerns about the level of public support for new measures to tackle smoking, these figures have removed any last shred of doubt.

"Even issues that were considered controversial at the time, such as the smoking ban in pubs and clubs, now enjoy the backing of nine in ten people," he said.

In a similar survey on this issue in 2006, 69 per cent of NSW adults said they supported a ban on smoking in outdoor dining areas. This suggests there has been a significant increase in public support for a state-wide ban.

The poll also revealed 90 per cent of voters say there should be more services to help smokers quit, highlighting public sympathy for the difficulties of smokers kicking the habit, while also wanting to avoid second-hand smoke.

"Second-hand smoke is a major risk factor for heart disease, the number one killer of Australian men and women," said Mr Thirlwell.

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