

Media Release



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SMOKE-FREE OUTDOOR AREAS DOUBLE IN TWO YEARS

The number of NSW councils that have introduced smoke-free outdoor areas has more than doubled in the last two years, according to a Heart Foundation survey.

As of May 2009, 58 councils had implemented smoke-free policy in certain outdoor areas compared to 28 councils in 2007. While children's playgrounds are the most common smoke-free area, the Heart Foundation is particularly welcoming the increase in councils making alfresco dining areas smoke-free.

Smoking is the largest single preventable cause of death, killing over 15,000 Australians a year. A recent study showed that a person's exposure to second-hand smoke can be just as high outside as it is indoors.

"There is no safe level of exposure to second-hand smoke so we congratulate these councils for introducing policies that improve the heart health of their communities," said Tony Thirlwell, Heart Foundation CEO – NSW.

"We urge the remaining NSW councils to follow suit and take this important step towards protecting their residents - young and old - from the harmful effects of cigarette smoke," he added.

Overall, almost two fifths (38%) of the 152 NSW councils have introduced smoke-free policy. Take-up is higher in the Sydney metropolitan area where 65% of councils have introduced policy compared to more than a quarter (28%) of regional councils.

"With nearly double the number of councils adopting outdoor smoke-free areas in just two years, it's encouraging that many are now listening and acting upon residents' needs," said Wendy Oakes, Tobacco Control Manager at Cancer Council NSW.

"Now it's time for the remaining councils to make this move, so that everybody can enjoy a meal outside their favourite restaurant, or take a trip to the playground without inhaling a cloud of toxic fumes," she added.

"Council and community support for outdoor smoking restrictions has been very impressive," said AMA (NSW) President Dr Brian Morton.

"These measures have a number of benefits. They reduce exposure to second-hand smoke, provide a disincentive for quitters to take up the habit again and reduce the attraction of smoking as a social activity. Smoke-free children's playgrounds send a further message to children that smoking is not good for you," Dr Morton added.

The Heart Foundation survey was conducted between April and May 2009 with similar surveys conducted in 2008 and 2007. To view the full report, visit www.heartfoundation.org.au/smokefree

To help local councils develop their own policy, a coalition made up of the Heart Foundation, Cancer Council NSW, the Australian Medical Association NSW and Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) Australia has developed an updated resource kit, which is available online at www.heartfoundation.org.au/smokefree

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