

10 April 2019

Heart Foundation endorses city's smoke-free area expansion

On Monday night, Hobart City Council's City Planning Committee carried several motions to establish more smoke-free areas across the city. We were there, delighted to witness almost unanimous support for the planned changes, which would see the entirety of the CBD, along with Franklin Square, the Soldiers Memorial Oval and the University Rose Garden become tobacco free.

I was further encouraged that the Committee heard our recommendations on some of the details of the motions. For instance, the original proposal was to set aside a designated smoking area in Franklin Square, above the toilet blocks. The problem with that is that such a compromise detracts from the messaging that we know to be effective in reducing smoking rates. If we want to make not smoking to be the norm, we need smoking out of the picture – and certainly far away from a beautiful, otherwise healthy living space where people and families gather. In her interview in *The Mercury* on Wednesday, Deputy Lord Mayor Helen Burnett agreed, saying that providing a designated smoking area would send mixed messages to smokers and the public.

We are also pushing for smoke-free areas to include the footpaths on the perimeter of the Royal Hobart Hospital and to increase the minimum distance from a business's doorway one can smoke to five metres (the current motion is for four, up from the existing three metres).

We're not alone in this. North Sydney Council is looking to declare their CBD smoke free some time this year, while Tamworth, Lismore and Glen Innes councils have already pulled it off. Closer to home, the north-west's Central Coast Council has made the Ulverstone shopping precinct smoke free – a first for Tasmania.

Hobart City Council has always been a leader in de-normalising smoking. In 2011 they were declared the state and national winner of the Heart Foundation's Local Government Awards, in part because they banned smoking in children's playgrounds, three pedestrian malls and outdoor dining facilities on council land. This was well before the state government introduced bans in pedestrian and bus malls (2014) and in outdoor eateries (2012).

Further action here in Tasmania comes not a moment too soon – Tasmanians are among the nation's heaviest smokers, with 17.6 per cent of adults currently smoking. The national average is 15.1 per cent.

Studies show that people associate smoking with lung cancer but are typically unaware of the raft of other conditions that can be brought about by smoking, like stroke, type two diabetes, macular degeneration, low bone density, lower fertility, and heart disease.

Heart disease causes more deaths in Australia than any other single disease. People who smoke are four times more likely to die of cardiovascular disease (that is, a heart attack or stroke) than those who do not smoke, and three times more likely to die from sudden cardiac death. Even non-smokers aren't immune from smoking – second-hand smoke can still cause heart disease, damage the arteries and cause blood platelets to clot, in just the same way it does in a smoker. We now know that one of the best ways of improving heart health is to reduce people's exposure to tobacco smoke.

The motions carried by the planning committee on Monday will be before a full council meeting next week. We urge the rest of the elected members to support them too. While the Hobart City Council has the power to declare the CBD smoke free without the state government's endorsement and shore up their leadership in the campaign to de-normalise smoking, we hope that the state government will also support the expansion of smoke-free areas, and look at further areas statewide that could be declared smoke free under the *Public Health Act 1997*.

If you'd like to quit smoking, call Quitline on 13 7848.

Graeme Lynch is chief executive of the Heart Foundation Tasmania