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## Tobacco-Free Youth

Every day hundreds of Australian kids start smoking and most will continue into adulthood.

According to Lisa Kenny, Drug Consultation & Liaison Nurse at Hornsby Ku-ring-gai Hospital, 90 per cent of adult smokers first light up as teenagers.

"Most smokers I speak with started in their teens and never expected to become addicted," said Lisa.

Overall, smoking rates in NSW have declined in recent years and residents of Northern Sydney Central Coast Area Health Service have the lowest smoking rates in NSW.

According to Lisa we are making progress, but we have more work to do to prevent young people taking up the habit.

"Children are still being targeted by the tobacco industry which spends billions of dollars every year to market its products to hook new, young and potentially life-long tobacco users. They know once they have teenagers, they probably have them for life," she said.

According to the Cancer Council of NSW, seventy per cent of the top 10 teenage films last year featured smoking and 75 per cent of these were PG-rated.

It is clearly proven that exposure to direct and indirect tobacco marketing, through such mediums as film and celebrities, leads to an increase in experimentation by young people. Nearly 60% of students in NSW aged 12-17 years thought smoking by celebrities encourages young people to take up smoking.

The evidence suggests that the younger children are when they first try smoking, the more likely they are to become regular adult smokers and the less likely they are to quit. Preventing young people from becoming regular smokers is the key to reducing tobacco-related death and disease.

"Avoiding or delaying the commencement of regular smoking is the best protection children and young people can be offered against becoming an adult smoker," said Lisa.

There are many reasons why children continue to take up smoking when the health risks are so well known. These include looking more mature, the rebellious image, the glamorous image portrayed in movies and peer pressure.

"The reality is that tobacco is not attractive, yet its glamorous image can be one of the reasons why the habit is first taken up by young people.

"Also many teenagers think they are bullet-proof, that tobacco related illness won't ever happen to them and that they will be able to give up easily," she said.

"The reality is that smoking is a hard habit to break because tobacco contains nicotine which is one of the most highly addictive drugs available. Some people argue that it is as addictive as heroin," said Lisa.

In NSW it is illegal to sell or supply tobacco to a person under the age of 18 years. The NSW Government has a number of programs in place to reduce smoking rates including tobacco education in schools, restrictions on tobacco advertising and promotions, the banning of fruit and confectionary flavoured cigarettes and prohibition of the sale of tobacco products to minors.

For those thinking about quitting, World No Tobacco Day on 31st May is a great day to take that important first step towards becoming a non-smoker.

"Not only for your own sake, but also for the sake of your children. Every image a child sees of a parent smoking is setting an example. Parents who are good role models and don't smoke will raise healthier children – by not smoking you could be saving their life," said Lisa.

Eight per cent of people can quit by themselves but the majority of smokers need support to quit. Evidence shows that smokers can more than double their chances of success by seeking help.

Free support services are available to anyone who needs them. Hornsby Ku-ring-gai Hospital's Drug, Alcohol and Gambling Service provides free consultations with experienced clinicians who will provide friendly, non-judgmental encouragement and support to assist whatever stage you may be at in the quitting process. Bookings can be made by telephoning 9477 9567. Smokers can also call the QUITLINE on 137848 for the cost of a local call (except mobiles).

On Friday 30<sup>th</sup> May between 10am – 2pm, Hornsby Ku-ring-gai Hospital will have a stall out the front of the new Emergency Department with giveaways, information and advice from drug counsellors on smoking.

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