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Time for a re-think on Budget Cuts to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Anti-smoking Programs

Research published today in the Medical Journal of Australia confirms the view of the Close the Gap Campaign Steering Committee that Federal Budget cuts to anti-smoking programs are likely to be detrimental to closing the gap in health inequality and financially counter-productive.

“Lives may be lost or at best severely shortened by budget austerity measures that cuts Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander anti-smoking campaigns,” Mick Gooda, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner and Co-Chair of the Close the Gap Campaign Steering Committee said today.

“The \$130 million in cuts forgets that reducing smoking rates reduces the risks which ultimately lead to a shorter life for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.”

The Close the Gap Campaign Steering Committee was responding to Dr Nicolette Hodyl and her co-authors published study of data from every single birth in South Australia between January 1999 and December 2008, which found that active cigarette smoking during pregnancy was associated with an increased risk of adverse perinatal outcomes and noted that the risk was greater in Aboriginal women as they are three times more likely to smoke. The research recommends that smoking cessation campaigns and programs be given greater resourcing.

“We know that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander anti-smoking campaigns have been successful in reducing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander smoking rates,” said Kirstie Parker, Co-Chair of the National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples and Co-Chair of the Close the Gap Campaign.

“With this further evidence of the disproportionate impact of smoking on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander maternal health, surely it’s time for a re-think on the budget cuts.

“Everyone wants to close the gap in health inequality. Short-term austerity should never trump long-term strategy, especially when lives are at stake,” Ms Parker said.

The research is published today in the September edition of the Medical Journal of Australia.

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