

Government response to the Education, Tourism, Innovation and Small Business Committee: Inquiry into smoking and tobacco use at universities, technical and further education facilities, and registered training organisations (Report No.12)

The Honourable Cameron Dick, Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services has released *My Health, Queensland's future: Advancing health 2026* which articulates a 10-year vision to make Queenslanders among the healthiest people in the world.

Continuing to reduce the impact of tobacco-related harms in the community is a leading opportunity for achieving the health improvement aspirations of *Advancing health 2026*.

Queensland's tobacco control approach includes creating smoke-free environments to protect health, prohibiting smoking product supply to children, and eliminating retail displays and product promotion. This approach also applies to electronic cigarettes, and is integrated with Commonwealth Government regulatory efforts. It has contributed to reducing adult smoking rates to 12%, and reducing uptake with less than 6% of young people in Queensland reporting that they are smokers.

Two of every three deaths in current long-term smokers can be directly attributed to their smoking. One third of smokers will die in middle age, losing at least 20 years of life. Each year in Queensland tobacco smoking costs the community around \$6 billion in healthcare costs, lost productivity in the workforce and through impact on household finances.

There is indisputable health, social and economic reasons to continue to take action to encourage smokers to quit, protect non-smokers from second-hand smoke and prevent young people from starting to smoke.

New tobacco laws commencing 1 September 2016 focus on providing smoke-free areas at the places frequented by young people including: skate parks, outdoor pedestrian malls, public swimming pools, public transport, during sporting events and at early childhood centres. These new laws protect young people from the temptation to smoke; reduce exposure to second-hand smoke and are an important extension of Queensland's already strong tobacco laws.

A key feature of Queensland's tobacco laws is the protection afforded to children at their places of education. Total smoking bans already in place for public and private schools together with the new smoking bans at early childhood education and care centres mean that early and school learning for Queensland children occurs in completely smoke-free environments.

Similarly as adults in the workforce Queenslanders are afforded protection with many workplaces also smoke-free environments.

However, there is a gap in smoke-free environment across the learning and earning life-course due to the inconsistent approach to smoke-free campuses by tertiary and training institutions.

Parliamentary Inquiry and recommendation

On 28 October 2015, the Legislative Assembly referred an inquiry into smoking and tobacco use at universities, technical and further education facilities, and registered training organisations to the Education, Tourism, Innovation and Small Business Committee.

The Committee tabled its report to the Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services on 29 April 2016 with one recommendation: “that the Government work with education and training organisations and their peak bodies to advise and assist with health promotion about smoke-free environments to support implementation of measures to reduce smoking on campus”.

The committee noted that the decline in smoking rates in Australia has been described as a true public health success story, and that public health interventions such as tobacco tax increases, restrictions on sale and promotion and legislation for smoke-free areas have contributed to this success.

The Committee’s report describes the downward trend in smoking for Queensland as “encouraging”, however, it noted that a higher proportion of Queenslanders, across all age groups, smoke compared with the national average. The Committee recognised that the encouraging downward trend in smoking rates for young people is apparent.

The report acknowledges that there are different approaches to reducing smoking on campuses across universities, TAFE and registered training organisations (RTOs). It found that while most institutions have implemented some form of smoking reduction policy, only a small number have implemented comprehensive smoke-free campus policies.

The Committee found that the absence of consistent smoke-free approaches across university, TAFE and RTO campuses means that protection from second-hand smoke afforded to students at all other places of education in Queensland is not apparent for students of tertiary education and training institutions.

The Committee noted the significant impact of smoking on young people and considers that due to the large number of young people attending university, TAFE and RTOs, that these institutions are uniquely placed contribute to preventing or delaying the uptake of smoking.

Since the tabling of the Committee report, it is also noted that on 31 May 2016, the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) introduced a comprehensive smoke-free policy. The total smoking bans are part of QUT’s commitment to providing a safe, supportive and healthy environment for all staff, students and the broader university community.

The Queensland Government accepts the Committee's recommendation to: "...work with education and training organisations and their peak bodies to advise and assist with health promotion about smoke-free environments to support implementation of measures to reduce smoking on campus".

The Queensland Government:

- acknowledges the importance of implementing measures to reduce smoking , including the creation of smoke-free environments;
- notes the varying mechanisms for achieving this, including regulation;
- notes a number of higher education and training institutions have put in place policies to implement smoke-free environments; and
- acknowledges that universities, TAFEs and RTOs need time to consult, prepare and plan for transition to smoke-free campuses.

The Queensland Government, through the Department of Health (DoH), will:

- communicate evidence for benefits of smoking restrictions, including the development and sharing of case studies on effective smoke-free implementation;
- invite universities, TAFEs and RTOs to participate in a joint approach over an 18-month period commencing 1 August 2016 to reduce smoking on campuses, where:
 - institutions develop, implement and manage smoke-free policies;
 - DoH provides free resources to support quitting, including online services, and tailored counselling from Quitline;
 - DoH incentivises uptake such as public recognition for the implementation of measures; and
 - DoH assesses the effectiveness of the collaborative approach to inform future policy considerations.

There will also be consultation with universities and TAFEs concerning the legislative option available to these public institutions to become 'smoke-free government precincts' under the *Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Regulation 1998*. Discussions will also be held with these institutions and RTOs regarding the Government's option to develop legislation to mandate smoke-free environments for all government and non-government higher education and training campuses.