



31st May 2011

MEDIA RELEASE

WORLD NO TOBACCO DAY - TOBACCO AND MENTAL ILLNESS

On World No Tobacco Day, 31st May 2011, The Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia (MIFA) is reminding everybody about the effect that smoking has on the physical health and well-being of all people, and in particular people affected by mental illness, who have alarmingly high rates of smoking in comparison to the rest of the population. More than 40% of the remaining smokers in Australia are people with a mental illness.

Their rate of smoking is reported to be between 58% and 68%, compared to 18-20% in the general population. It is reported that 90% of individuals with schizophrenia smoke. People with mental illness tend to smoke more cigarettes per day. In particular, it has been found that smokers with schizophrenia and other types of serious mental illness smoke significantly more heavily than smokers within the general population.

Despite the challenges of dealing with their mental illness, many are motivated to attend smoking reduction and cessation groups. When supported programmes providing nicotine replacement and counselling are offered to people with mental illness, they are able to quit smoking at equivalent rates to the general population.

Programs such as the MIFA Tobacco and Mental Illness Project are specifically tailored for people with mental illness, helping participants quit or reduce their tobacco use. This program is run by mental health and peer workers, and includes education on mental health, dealing with boredom and stress, building confidence and coping strategies, as well as nicotine replacement therapy and telephone counselling as added support. These programs work, but are only available to a tiny percentage of the people who need them.

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