

HESTA Australian Nursing Awards
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Media Release
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Quit SA nurse honored for tackling Indigenous smoking

A cancer survivor, Aboriginal Elder and Quitline Liaison Officer for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) communities is one of five finalists in the Nurse of the Year category of the HESTA Australian Nursing Awards.

David Copley, Cancer Council and Quit SA's inaugural ATSI Liaison Officer — funded through the Federal Government's National Indigenous Tackling Tobacco Program — has been charged with making Quitline services more culturally sensitive, accessible and effective for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

An Elder of Kurna and Peramangk descent, Mr Copley works with individual Aboriginal health workers, clients, community elders and colleagues to develop the best possible tools to support clients who want to reduce or quit smoking.

In just 12 months, Mr Copley's work has helped double the number of Aboriginal clients calling the Quitline for smoking cessation support. If this level of engagement continues, over the next five years more than 800 Aboriginal clients will have experienced better health outcomes and life expectancy because of the initiatives he has implemented.

Smoking is a major contributor to the life expectancy gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. It is estimated that smoking causes 12% of the sickness and bad health, and 20% of all deaths in Aboriginal populations.

"We know Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have high rates of tobacco use but we need to understand why. Why do we smoke so much? What are the social determinants?" Mr Copley said.

"When we talk to Aboriginal clients we don't tell them they have to quit now. We talk about why they are smoking and we talk about going on a journey to reduce smoking that might end with quitting."

Mr Copley said smoking related cancer was three times more prevalent in Indigenous communities than the rest of the population, and the mortality rate is also significantly higher.

Mr Copley works closely with Aboriginal Health Services and Divisions of General Practice — in Adelaide and areas including Port Lincoln and Port Augusta — providing training and support programs to encourage Aboriginal health professionals to reduce their own smoking rates and make health services smoke-free environments.

His role also includes providing cultural training to Quitline staff in metropolitan and regional areas of South Australia to help them better understand Aboriginal communities and the root causes of high smoking rates — currently 48% in ATSI communities compared with 19.7% of the Australian general population.

Mr Copley will be flown to Melbourne for the HESTA Australian Nursing Awards gala dinner on 10 May. The winner of the Nurse of the Year award will receive a \$5,000 ME Bank *EveryDay* Transaction Account and a \$5,000 education grant.

The prize money is provided by ME Bank, a supporter of the awards since 2008.

Visit hestaawards.com to book tickets for the event or learn more about the awards.

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