



## Smoking and Mental Health

### The Department of Health will be smokefree from 1 January 2008.

The purpose of implementing the smoke free policy in health services is to improve the health of all Western Australians by preventing exposure to passive smoking.

This fact sheet, informed by mental health consumers and health professionals, addresses a range of common concerns and myths about smoking.

**Myth: People with a mental illness do not smoke any more than the general population.** **Fact:** In Australia, as many as 88% of people with a mental illness smoke compared with 25% for the general population. In 2005 we surveyed public mental health inpatient services and found that over 43% of patients smoke but in Western Australians 15.5% aged over 14 years smoke.

**Myth: Australia is the only place where they are banning smoking in mental health services.** **Fact:** Canada, United Kingdom and the United States and other states have all introduced successful smoking bans.

**Myth: People with a mental illness have a right to smoke.** **Fact:** Although smoking is legal, mental health consumers and health service staff are entitled to work in an environment in which they are not exposed to passive smoking.

**Myth: Special smoking areas stop the effects of passive smoking and protect staff and nonsmokers.** **Fact:** There is no such thing as safe levels of exposure to secondhand cigarette smoke.

**Myth: If mental health consumers cannot smoke they could become aggressive.** **Fact:** Research in America, Canada and Australia illustrates that aggression, use of seclusion, discharge against medical advice or use of extra medication did not increase in a smoke free environment.

**Myth: Mental health consumers are being forced to quit.** **Fact:** Most people who have a mental illness and smoke say they would like to stop smoking; they say they need help to quit.

**Myth: People with a mental illness will refuse to go to hospitals that have a smoking ban.** **Fact:** Research shows that this has not happened in other states and countries. However, the University of Western Australia School of Psychiatry has started research in WA to assess the local impact of smoke free environments.

