



## Smoking tobacco is not a part of culture.

### How long has tobacco been around?

- ▶ Since long before Colonisation, Indigenous people **chewed the leaves of native tobacco plants**, which grow across the desert regions of Australia.
- ▶ Bush tobacco, often known as pituri, **contained nicotine** and was chewed, and traded widely over long distances.



Pituri or 'bush tobacco'

- ▶ **Smoking tobacco** using pipes, was introduced to Indigenous people by **Macassan fisherman sailing from Indonesia** in the eighteenth century.
- ▶ Smoking tobacco was **traded by the Macassan fisherman as a sign of respect and acknowledgement of Indigenous ownership of the land**, in exchange for access to coastal waters and camping places from the Kimberly to the Gulf of Carpentaria. **This tobacco was mainly used for ceremonies** rather than every day, as the supply was not year-round.

### How tobacco influenced cultural change

- ▶ When Europeans first arrived, **tobacco and pipes were often presented to Indigenous people as a token of goodwill**.
- ▶ The introduced tobaccos and pipes from the Europeans **soon became popular and widely sought after by Indigenous communities**, along with other introduced items such as blankets, flour and sugar.
- ▶ Our People **quickly became addicted to the European's tobacco**, and this was recognised by the settlers who offered more tobacco and other items in exchange for labour.
- ▶ The Indigenous people were **encouraged to forego their traditional lifestyle** and become **compliant participants in the settlement's activities**, in return for tobacco and other rations.
- ▶ Pre-existing use of nicotine and barter among the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island population **predisposed them to ready acceptance** of European tobacco.
- ▶ The relentless process of more than 200 years of colonisation has **done much to reinforce smoking in these populations**.

Keen to butt out your boondah? Contact us to learn more about our support programs:

**Email:** [tis@gph.org.au](mailto:tis@gph.org.au) | **Call:** [02] 6298 2900

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THE  
FACTS

# History of tobacco

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Smoking is now more common among Indigenous people than among non-Indigenous people in Australia.

Currently, **2 out of 5** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people smoke cigarettes daily, which is around **3 times the smoking rate of non-Indigenous people**.



The reasons for the high smoking rates among Our People are complex.

They include:

- ▶ **Being exposed to smoking early in life** and living in a community where it is “normal” to smoke.
- ▶ **Social disadvantage** such as living in poverty, leaving school early, and unemployment.
- ▶ **Smoking to cope with life stressors** such as housing stress, mental illness, use of alcohol or other drugs.
- ▶ **Grief and loss.**
- ▶ The **culture of sharing**, often involving tobacco products.

## Cultural smoking versus tobacco smoking

- ▶ A smoking ceremony is **an ancient Aboriginal custom** that involves **smouldering various native plants to produce smoke**.
- ▶ This herbal smoke is believed to have **cleansing properties** and the ability to **ward off bad spirits**.
- ▶ More recently, elements of smoking ceremonies have been incorporated into **Welcome to Country performances**.



Smoking ceremony

**When quitting gets tough, remember that daily tobacco smoking is a relatively recent practice for Indigenous people, and is not actually a part of our traditional culture.**

[www.tobaccoinaustralia.org.au/chapter-8-apts/8-2-history-of-tobacco-use-among-aboriginal-people](http://www.tobaccoinaustralia.org.au/chapter-8-apts/8-2-history-of-tobacco-use-among-aboriginal-people)

CEITC Smoking Matters fact sheet

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