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Press release from ASH Wales Cymru

Embargoed: Immediate

Welsh Smoking Rates Fall but Health Gap Widens

New health statistics released today (Thursday 29th June) show the number of smokers in Wales has fallen to a record low of 19%, with a significant decrease in the most affluent areas.

The National Survey for Wales - previously known as the Welsh Health Survey - is an annual survey of the health and wellbeing of more than 10,000 residents.

The latest results show a Welsh Government target of 19% in smoking prevalence by 2016 has been reached, however health inequalities between the least and most deprived people in Wales are increasing.

Smoking rates among the 'least deprived' stand at 9%, versus 28% among the 'most deprived' – representing a 19% difference and an increase of 1% on last year. The difference between Local Authorities is vast too; the lowest smoking prevalence rate being 13% in Conwy whilst Neath Port Talbot is the highest at 24%.

The survey also shows that 64% of all smokers would like to give up and 44% have tried. Suzanne Cass, Chief Executive of ASH Wales Cymru, said: "Thanks to a decade of progressive tobacco control policies, more than 80% of the Welsh population are now smokefree and this is fantastic news.

"However, it is concerning to see the health inequality gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' is widening. We need to specifically target those 'hard to reach' groups where smoking levels remain high and tailor services, messaging and campaigns to support and capture these groups who have not yet been reached.

"The next target of 16% by 2020 is ambitious and there is much work to be done to ensure we reach this next milestone."

Other results show 7% of people are current users of e-cigarettes; nicotine-containing devices and the majority of these are smokers who are trying to give up.

"We are happy to see that increasingly more people are taking steps such as using an e-cigarette to move away from deadly cigarettes. Research shows these devices are 95% safer than traditional cigarettes and we fully support their use to get people off tobacco, which kills one in two of its long-term users," Suzanne Cass continued.

The survey shows 44% of all e-cigarette users are now no longer smoking and only 1% of users had tried an e-cigarette before trying tobacco.

These latest stats come a couple of months after a new quit smoking service, Help Me Quit, was launched across Wales. The new service and website offers tailored advice specific to

the needs of would-be quitters. To find out more call 0800 085 2219 or visit helpmequit.wales

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