

## **Smoking prevalence in England is below 20% for the first time in 80 years**

A recent BMJ clinical review provided a useful and timely update on smoking cessation <sup>1</sup> We thought it would be useful to expand on the section of the review on ‘Who smokes’ by sharing the latest findings on smoking prevalence in England from a large national surveillance study which has been tracking smoking prevalence since 2006.<sup>2</sup> Each month a new sample of approximately 1800 individuals aged  $\geq 16$  are selected using a form of random location sampling and complete a computer-assisted household survey with a trained interviewer. Prevalence data are weighted to match English census data on age, sex, and socioeconomic group. The methods have been shown to result in a sample that is nationally representative in its socio-demographic composition and proportion of smokers as compared with other large national surveys such as Health Survey for England.<sup>2</sup> An advantage of the Smoking Toolkit Study is that the data are available within weeks of collection and published online at [www.smokinginengland.info](http://www.smokinginengland.info).

For the first time in probably 80 years, England has seen smoking prevalence fall below 20%. In 2013, 22,167 adults were surveyed. The prevalence of cigarette smoking was 19.3% (95%CI 18.8 to 19.8). Smoking was rare at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century but increased relentlessly until the publication of ‘Smoking and Health’ in 1962 by which stage over 70% of men and 40% of women smoked.<sup>3</sup>

The decline in prevalence started in the 1970s and since then has averaged 0.6% per year; in 2013 it was slightly above this at 0.8% ([www.smokinginengland.info](http://www.smokinginengland.info)). There is much still to be done, particularly on the social gradient in smoking, which contributes substantially to health inequalities.<sup>4</sup> However, we hope that breaking the 20% barrier will motivate smoking

cessation efforts across the country, including making more use of our stop-smoking services.<sup>5</sup>

## References

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## Competing interests

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no other financial relationships with any organisations that might have an interest in the submitted work.