



# Call for tobacco sale cutbacks in poor areas

**Grant McArthur**

ANTI-tobacco campaigners are pushing for licences for cigarette retailers and restrictions to stop them aiming at poor communities already suffering health issues.

A new Australian study has found the poorest areas have more than four times the number of tobacco outlets per resident than wealthy suburbs, with regional towns most likely to be saturated with cigarette sales.

Findings from the West Australian research have reinforced calls from Quit Victoria for the State Government to introduce a licensing process for tobacco retailers as the first step to restricting availability.

There are 9000 tobacco retailers in Victoria, and an estimated 35,000 across Australia, however, Victoria is one of only two states where you do not need a licence to sell cigarettes.

Quit Victoria executive director Fiona Sharkie said the state's 150 specialist tobacconists were the only retailers to undergo a licensing process, and action was needed to limit retailers saturating vulnerable communities.

“The first step would be to have a

licensing scheme and then some way of starting to restrict where tobacco can be sold,” Ms Sharkie said.

“When tobacco kills one out of every two long-term users — and we do have higher smoking rates in low socio-economic people — we should start to look at restricting the availability of tobacco.”

Writing in the *Medical Journal of Australia*, Assoc Prof Lisa Wood, of the University of Western Australia, said areas saturated with easy access to tobacco undermined smokers' intentions to quit, made it easier for people to become addicted and exacerbated health concerns that already cut life expectancy in poor areas.

Her study found there were more than twice as many tobacco retailers per resident in areas with low socio-economic status than in wealthy populations, and four times as many in highly disadvantaged areas.

With 15,500 Australians dying from tobacco-related causes each year, Assoc Prof Wood said the results underscored the need for states to consider restricting retailers.

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