

# Timor's smoke screen

## Uni helping to cut back on smoking

NICOLE MILLS

IN EAST Timor there isn't much incentive to kick the habit.

Smoking is everywhere and big tobacco companies are investing plenty of money to see the trend continue.

There is little to no education about the dangers of tobacco, especially in villages, where health teams may only visit once a month. As a result East Timor has the highest rate of smoking among males of anywhere in the world.

But a partnership between Deakin University and East Timorese health promotion officer Thomas Lopes hopes to change that.

Though Mr Lopes, 38, never had a secondary education himself, he has taught himself English and is now a passionate health advocate.

"Tobacco is one of the biggest problems," he said on Wednesday after a luncheon held in Geelong to celebrate



**HELPING HAND:** Dr Kim Dunphy, Afonso Soares, Simao Do Rosario, Thomas Lopes, Professor John Toumbourou and Professor Brendan Crotty announce the new partnership between Deakin University and the Ministry of Education Timor Leste. Picture: PETER RISTEVSKI

the initiative. "Everybody can smoke including young people and it is in the public places so everyone is affected.

"We are trying to just put in their mind that smoking is bad and then many people may choose to stop smoking."

Deakin University health psychology chair Prof John

Toumbourou said the university was thrilled to be involved in such a great initiative that could have benefits across the region.

"A lot of the Asian nations are seeing big increases in tobacco use," he said. "The tobacco companies have really targeted Asia and the develop-

ing world and they have been very successful.

"Any solution we find that works in East Timor, we think may be successful throughout the rest of Asia."

Prof Toumbourou said the project was still looking for financial support and urged individuals or organisations who

wanted to get involved to contact him at the university.

Deakin University is also partnering with Afonso Soares and Simao Do Rosario who are working to improve education policy and data collection as the country tries to rapidly increase education participation within a generation.