

# Social Determinants of Health

The World Health Organisation (WHO) Commission on Social Determinants of Health (the Commission) report *Closing the Gap in a Generation* identified preventable health inequities arising from the circumstances and environment in which people live and work, in addition to the political, social and economic influences on these circumstances. The three broad recommendations of the Commission were to:

- Improve daily living conditions – the circumstances in which children are born, grow, and learn, and improve the conditions in which people live, work and age
- Tackle the inequitable distribution of power, money and resources
- Measure and understand the problem and assess the impact of action

The *National Preventative Health Strategy, Australia: The Healthiest Country by 2020* released by the Commonwealth Government in 2009, identifies action on social determinants as essential to addressing inequities in obesity, tobacco use and alcohol consumption. The National Centre for Socioeconomic Modelling (NATSEM) reported that the adoption of the Commission's recommendations would result in significant savings in government outlays and improved personal outcomes.

While the Australian Government's support for the Commission's report as described in the subsequent Rio Political Declaration on Social Determinants of Health is implied by way of Australia's membership of the WHO, no explicit statement of support has been made.

There is some evidence of successful engagement with the Commission's recommendations at the state level, particularly in South Australia (Health in All Policy approach) and Tasmania (Fair and Healthy Tasmania).

## AHHA POSITION:

- ✦ The Australian Government should make a formal statement of support for the WHO Commission recommendations on the social determinants of health.
- ✦ The Australian Government should develop an action plan in cooperation with state and territory governments to implement the recommendations of the WHO Commission.
- ✦ The Australian Government should develop and implement a 'health in all policy' approach and require Health Impact Assessments to inform policy development and legislative change.
- ✦ National Partnership Agreements should include a Health Improvement Dividend section to identify and quantify the impact on the social determinants of health and health outcomes arising from the Agreements.
- ✦ An Australian Commission on the Social Determinants of Health should be established to coordinate inter-agency action across all levels of government and report annually on progress to address the social determinants and reduce health inequity.

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