

Chronic Disease

Chronic disease remains the leading cause of illness, disability and death in Australia. One-half of all Australians report having at least one chronic disease, and 23% have two or more. In 2015, chronic diseases contributed to 87% of all deaths in Australia.

The rising prevalence and high personal, economic and societal costs make chronic disease Australia's biggest health challenge.

A large proportion of the chronic disease burden is preventable through reduced exposure to modifiable risk factors including tobacco use, high body mass, high alcohol use, physical inactivity, high blood pressure, abnormal blood fats (such as cholesterol) and impaired fasting blood glucose.

In 2013, Australia endorsed the *WHO Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases 2013–2020*. This plan aims to achieve a 25% reduction in chronic disease globally by 2025 through the action of member states, UN organisations and WHO.

Despite recognition of the increasing burden of chronic disease, the Australian health system has been slow to respond. This is in part due to the historic nature of our health system which was built around the treatment of infectious diseases, as well as inconsistent investment in preventive health, inadequate prevention and chronic disease management and fragmented care with insufficient coordination across the system.

Health inequality further complicates this picture, with chronic disease disproportionately affecting under-served population groups.

Chronic diseases are occurring earlier in life, and as a result many Australians are living longer with chronic diseases and more complex care needs. Individuals will increasingly find themselves in need of multiple types of care, from a range of providers, across care sectors over extended periods of time. Changes are needed to achieve a sustainable health system that responds more effectively to chronic diseases.

Implementation of effective preventive health strategies can reduce the number of people living with chronic diseases and the severity of those conditions. Strategies to provide effective and appropriate management for chronic disease are also important in achieving better health outcomes.

AHHA POSITION:

- ✦ Sustained investment in chronic disease and preventive health programs is needed. This will require:
 - regional needs assessments determining projected population need over 5–10 years;
 - a commitment to providing better access to preventive health and chronic disease programs that are culturally safe, effective, accessible and of high-quality. Programs should be informed by evidence, local and international experience, as well as engaging with the community. Strategies should include population-wide and targeted approaches, addressing issues of regional need and issues specific to vulnerable populations;
 - greater coordination and integration of services across care sectors to ensure better service delivery, improved efficiency, better health outcomes and improved quality of life;
 - a commitment to achieve improved consumer health literacy;
 - a commitment to early detection and targeted secondary prevention;
 - comprehensive and coherent policies that share responsibility across all levels of government, industry and community.
- ✦ Funding for preventive health should initially target a return to 2.3% of recurrent expenditure on health.
- ✦ The *National Strategic Framework for Chronic Conditions* should be implemented. This will require development, monitoring and reporting of performance measures that also align with the *WHO Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases 2013–2020* to evaluate progress.
- ✦ Recognising that states/territories have primary responsibility for many areas of service delivery, National Agreements and National Partnership Agreements should include a Health Improvement Dividend component to identify roles and responsibilities, and quantify the impact on the social determinants of health and health outcomes arising from the Agreements.
- ✦ For a Health Care Homes model to succeed, it requires adequate funding to support multi-disciplinary team-based care and enrolment of all Australians, not just those with multimorbidity.

For information: Alison Verhoeven, Chief Executive, 0403 282 501