

Preventive Health

Preventive health measures aim to reduce illness, prevent disease and promote wellness. This in turn reduces individual, intergenerational and health system burden, improves health system resource use and boosts productivity through greater economic participation and productivity.

Australia spends less on public health and prevention than most other OECD countries, ranked third lowest in 2012 with 1.8% of recurrent health spending, compared with Canada's 5.9% and New Zealand's 7%. Since peaking at 2.3% in 2007-08, spending has fallen to 1.5% in 2013-14.

Australia's increasing burden of chronic disease intensifies the need for investment in evidence-based preventive health strategies. This is reinforced by Australia's commitment to the 2025 WHO global targets to reduce premature mortality from the four major non-communicable diseases, cardiovascular disease, cancer, chronic lung diseases and diabetes.

Preventive health requires long-term national leadership and sustained investment. This is highlighted by Australia's tobacco control success which has resulted in a near halving of daily rates of smoking from 24.3% in 1991 to 12.8% in 2013.

With the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments currently facing budgetary pressure from rising health costs, an effective way to in part address concerns about future budget pressures is to take earlier steps to prevent health conditions from occurring, delaying the onset and reducing the severity of any conditions. Preventive health is an important means of reducing future demand on the health system while simultaneously improving quality of life for all Australians.

AHHA POSITION:

✦ Investing in preventive health measures will benefit the wellbeing of all Australians, particularly with the rising prevalence of chronic disease and their associated risk factors.

- ✦ Preventive health measures improve health system resource use, enhance economic performance through greater workforce participation and productivity, and are a low cost way of reducing future budgetary pressures.
- ✦ A commitment to preventive care requires:
 - A commitment to improved consumer health literacy.
 - A commitment to dedicated funding for specific preventive health programs, including targeted and population-wide approaches.
 - Comprehensive and coherent policies that share responsibility across all levels of government, industry and community.
 - Preventive health programs that are informed by evidence, local and international experience as well as engaging with the community and responding to their needs. This includes:
 - The use of international developments such as the UK's introduction of a sugar tax.
 - Learning from Australia's previous experience with sustained preventive health programs that have made progress on rates of immunisation, tobacco use and road safety.
 - Understanding and responding to local needs through work such as the Primary Health Network community needs assessments.
 - Establishment of long term research projects to understand the impact of preventive healthcare and its ability to achieve better health outcomes.
- ✦ Priority areas of focus in preventive health should include:
 - Overweight and obesity
 - Alcohol misuse and abuse
 - Tobacco control
 - Inequality
 - Immunisation
- ✦ Future Intergenerational Reports should quantify the impact on the fiscal outlook from inadequately resourcing preventive health.

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