



Preventive Health

Preventive health measures aim to reduce illness, prevent disease and promote wellness.

Preventive health is an important means of reducing future demand on the health system while simultaneously improving quality of life for all Australians.

Australia spends less on preventive care than most other OECD countries, ranked third lowest in 2015 with 1.9% of recurrent health spending, compared with Canada's 6.2% and United Kingdom's 4.1%. Since peaking at 2.3% in 2007–08, public health spending has fallen to 1.6% in 2016–17.

Australia's increasing prevalence of chronic diseases intensifies the need for investment in evidence-based preventive health strategies. Much of this 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.

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 12.2% in 2016.

With the Commonwealth, state and territory governments facing continued budgetary pressure from rising health costs, an effective way to address future budgetary pressures is to take earlier steps to prevent health conditions from occurring, delaying the onset, reducing the severity and preventing co-morbidity.

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.

AHHA POSITION:

- ✦ Sustained investment in 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 programs that are culturally safe, effective, accessible and of high-quality. Programs should be informed by evidence, local and international experience, and co-designed with community partners. Strategies should include population-wide and targeted approaches, addressing issues specific to vulnerable populations and regional need;
 - preventive health measures should take into account the social determinants of health, and require partnerships and engagement with community and social service providers;
 - a commitment to improving consumer health literacy;
 - a commitment to early detection and targeted secondary prevention;
 - establishment of long-term research projects to understand the impact of preventive healthcare and its ability to achieve better health outcomes (including cost effectiveness);
 - 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.
- ✦ Priority areas of focus in preventive health should include:
 - inequality;
 - overweight and obesity;
 - alcohol misuse and abuse;
 - tobacco control;
 - immunisation.
- ✦ Future Intergenerational Reports should quantify the impact of inadequately resourcing preventive health.