

AUSTRALIAN CHRONIC DISEASE PREVENTION ALLIANCE



Media Release

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Chronic disease death toll requires urgent investment in prevention

Australia's largest disease prevention groups are calling on the government to ramp up its investment in preventive health following a report highlighting that three out of five premature deaths in Australia caused by chronic disease could be prevented.

"Over 25,000 Australians are dying prematurely from chronic disease each year through inadequate investment in prevention," said Professor Greg Johnson, Chair of the Australian Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance responding to a report from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

"The toll is especially high amongst disadvantaged Australians who are dying prematurely from chronic disease at up to twice the rate of those who are better off.

"The government must reverse this toll by doing much more to tackle chronic disease risk factors such as smoking, obesity and excessive alcohol consumption," Professor Johnson said.

"Good initiatives are already underway including federal funding for community, school and work based programs, recent increases in tobacco tax and the government's commitment to plain packaging for cigarettes, but more action is required, particularly in obesity prevention," he said.

"Only 2% of health system expenditure currently goes to prevention and public health while 20% is spent on treating chronic disease.

"This highlights the enormous disconnect between the amount we invest in preventive health and the cost to our society of avoidable disability and premature death from chronic disease," he said.

Professor Johnson said that health system costs for treating chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, cancer and chronic kidney disease were expected to triple to over \$40 billion dollars a year within 20 years.

"Yet we could avoid a substantial proportion of these costs and improve health, well being and productivity by investing more in prevention strategies now," he said.

A recent report highlighted the enormous health gains and cost savings that could be achieved by investing in prevention, identifying a package of interventions that over time could save \$11 billion dollars in health costs for an investment of only \$4.6 billion.

"Together with the strategy recommended by the National Preventative Health Taskforce last year and the establishment of the new preventive health agency early next year, we now have a strong platform for increased government action to reduce smoking, alcohol abuse and the burgeoning rates of obesity and overweight that are driving our increasing rates of chronic disease," he said.

"Boosting investment in prevention now is critical if we are to reverse the enormous toll of premature, avoidable deaths caused by chronic disease in Australia."

"Key priorities include plain packaging for cigarettes, increased taxation on tobacco and alcohol, social marketing to encourage healthier lifestyles, reformulating processed foods to make them healthier, reducing marketing of unhealthy foods to children, introducing new easy to understand front-of-pack labelling to help people make healthier food choices and better infrastructure to encourage more physical activity."

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Australian Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance members: Cancer Council Australia; Diabetes Australia; Kidney Health Australia; Heart Foundation; National Stroke Foundation.