

Media Release

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Tobacco tax, bowel screening should be 2010-11 budget priorities, says Cancer Council

Life-saving measures in Treasury submission

Increased tobacco tax and an expanded bowel cancer screening program should be priorities for the 2010-11 federal budget if the Rudd Government is to back its moves towards healthcare reform with decisive action, Cancer Council Australia said today.

Releasing Cancer Council Australia's pre-budget submission to Treasury, Chief Executive Officer, Professor Ian Olver, said the Government had campaigned on improved disease prevention and consulted appropriately for almost two years. Next financial year was the time to deliver.

"When it comes to reducing death and disease caused by smoking, the best measure available to Government is tobacco tax, particularly among people on lower incomes," Professor Olver said.

"Increasing cigarette prices by 21 per cent would prompt 130,000 Australian adults to quit smoking and prevent 35,000 children from becoming addicted to nicotine. It would also raise an extra \$1.3 billion in annual revenue – more than enough to fund public health initiatives like the bowel cancer screening program."

Professor Olver said the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program had the greatest unrealised potential to immediately prevent cancer deaths, with a fully implemented program saving 30 lives per week by picking up early-stage cancers.

"Yet instead of providing two-yearly screening for all Australians aged 50 and over, the program is only available once-off to people turning 50, 55 and 65," he said. "At a minimum we want to see 60 and 70 year-olds added, which would identify an additional 630 early-stage bowel cancers each year."

"Adding 60 and 70 year-olds to the program will save hundreds of lives through early detection in the short-term and build capacity for full implementation over the long-term."

"The Government has already committed to fully implementing the program. Lives are being lost unnecessarily and further delays cannot be justified."

Professor Olver said the pre-budget submission was accompanied by an album of personal stories as part of Cancer Council Australia's "Get behind bowel cancer screening" online campaign (www.getbehindbowelscreening.com.au).

More than 15,000 Australians have emailed their Member of Parliament in response to the campaign and around 100 have contributed personal stories to the campaign website.

The budget submission is available at: www.cancer.org.au/budgetsubmission
The album is available at: www.cancer.org.au/bowelscreeningalbum

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