



23 June 2016

Mr Michael Thorn  
Chief Executive  
Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education  
Via email: meredythe.crane@fare.org.au

Dear Mr Thorne

Thank you for your letter to George Wright presenting *Prevention 1<sup>st</sup> Election Platform: Our Greatest Health Challenge*.

Labor supports the World Health Organisation's non-communicable disease targets and will make prevention a priority of the Australian Government once more.

A Shorten Labor Government will tackle Australia's chronic disease crisis through a preventive health package that helps families to raise healthy children, and keeps Australians healthy throughout their lives.

Chronic diseases are the leading cause of illness, disability and death in Australia. One in three Australians suffer from at least one chronic disease, like heart disease or diabetes.

Many of these diseases are due to preventable risk factors such as physical inactivity, poor nutrition, smoking and harmful use of alcohol.

Labor has a five-point plan to prevent chronic disease:

1. Investing in 50 Healthy Communities nationwide, to help communities at the greatest risk of chronic disease to stay well.
2. Tackling obesity through Australia's first National Physical Activity Strategy and a National Nutrition Framework.
3. Expanding the successful Better Health Channel into a nationwide platform for health information.
4. Continuing the push to reduce smoking rates, particularly in at-risk communities.
5. Addressing harmful use of alcohol through a National Alcohol Strategy.

Labor will invest \$300 million over four years in this package to prevent chronic disease.

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## Healthy Communities

Experts agree that national leadership and investment are needed to drive change towards healthy behaviours. But the Liberals have abandoned the federal government's leadership role in prevention. There is no nationwide funding or architecture to promote health and prevent chronic disease.

As part of its prevention plan, a Shorten Labor Government will invest \$100 million in establishing 50 Healthy Communities. Labor will identify the communities that are most at risk of chronic disease, and invest in keeping them healthy.

This approach has worked in Victoria, which used investment from the last federal Labor Government to focus on 12 Healthy Together Communities. These communities received additional support – such as coordinators embedded in local government, who worked to increase physical activity and improve nutrition across their communities.

Labor's \$100 million two year commitment will allow the initiative to resume in Victoria and begin across the country. Consistent with the level of 12 priority regions in Victoria, Labor will identify 50 local government areas across the country as Healthy Communities. These communities will be selected based on evidence that chronic disease and/or risk factors are more prevalent than elsewhere. The selected communities will receive intense investment and support to help them meet their unique challenges.

Traditionally, preventive health strategies have been project-based, targeting certain people and problems. But Labor's Healthy Communities initiative will take a comprehensive view. It will aim to embed healthy attitudes and behaviours everywhere people in these communities live, learn, work and play.

For example, Labor's investment will help food producers, distributors and vendors to make healthy food options available in schools, workplaces and communities. Labor will also work with local and state governments to encourage physical activity, such as by building walking and cycling paths.

## Tackling obesity

Australia is one of the most overweight countries on earth. Two-thirds of Australian adults are overweight or obese. And tragically, one in four Australian kids also weighs too much.

The personal and social effects of being overweight or obese are devastating. Obesity causes around one quarter of all type 2 diabetes and osteoarthritis. It also causes around 20 per cent of heart disease and some cancers. Overall, obesity outranks tobacco and alcohol as a cause of chronic disease.

The economic costs of obesity are just as profound. The total annual cost of obesity has been put at more than \$58 billion, including direct health care costs, lost productivity, and reduced quality of life.

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### *Australia's first National Physical Activity Strategy*

As part of Labor's investment in preventive health, a Shorten Labor Government will commit \$90 million over three years for Australia's first National Physical Activity Strategy. For the first time, the full attention and resources of the Australian Government will be devoted to getting Australians moving more.

Doing so will bring Australia into line with the more than three dozen countries that already have national physical activity plans. Strategies like the world-leading "Let's Make Scotland More Active" plan have had demonstrated success in increasing activity and reducing obesity, and the harms that come with it.

Participation in sport and other formal activity will play a part in Labor's Strategy. But the key finding from international experience is that we need to build physical activity into the day-to-day lives of all Australians – not just those who play organised sport.

In developing Australia's Strategy, Labor will be informed by the 2015 National Physical Activity Consensus Forum's Canberra Communique. Led by the Heart Foundation, more than 300 experts and stakeholders contributed to the Communique. It calls for policies that boost activity across all groups (including children and seniors), settings (including workplaces, neighbourhoods and cities) and sectors (including health, education and transport).

### *Improving our diets*

Of all the risk factors that threaten our health, dietary risks are the most dangerous. They cause more of the burden of disease than any other factor, including smoking, inactivity and dangerous drinking. Put simply, our diets are leading directly to heart disease, cancer and type 2 diabetes, as well as obesity and the chronic diseases that come with it.

A Shorten Labor Government will commit \$10 million to introduce a National Nutrition Framework. Dieticians and other stakeholders have long called for a National Framework, and Labor started work towards this in Government. After three years of inaction by the Liberal Government, Labor will finish the job. Labor will work with all relevant stakeholders to set out our national nutritional needs, identify the barriers to good nutrition, and set a vision and reform directions for nutrition in the years ahead.

As part of the Framework, a Shorten Labor Government will work with food producers and retailers to expand the Health Star Rating system. In Government Labor initiated Health Star Ratings following a comprehensive review of food labelling and demands from consumers for a simple front-of-pack system to make choosing healthy food easier. On coming to Government the Coalition tried to scrap the system, like so many preventive health programs. But pressure from Labor and consumers forced them to back down, and the system is proving to be a success.

A Shorten Labor Government would also continue the important work of the National Food and Health Dialogue. Labor established the Dialogue in 2009, in response to alarming evidence that

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Australian children eat too much salt and saturated fat and not enough fruit and vegetables. The Dialogue brings together the food industry, health groups and government to make our food more healthy and nutritious. After two years of inaction, the Coalition grudgingly re-convened the Dialogue in late 2015 (as the 'Healthy Food Partnership') – but Labor wants a renewed effort on the targets for salt, sugar and fat reduction.

On top of these population-wide measures, Labor would bring an intense focus on children's nutrition. Improving what kids eat can help to address the alarming rates of childhood obesity, as well as establish healthy eating habits for life.

A Shorten Labor Government will:

- Commit \$5 million over four years to expand the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden program. The program helps children form positive food habits for life by delivering fun food education. Labor kickstarted the national program with a \$13 million investment in the 2008-09 Budget, and later continued the program with a further \$5.4 million investment. In spite of receiving no support from the Liberals for three years, the program now reaches 150,000 kids in over 1,000 schools. Labor's new, \$5 million investment will allow the program to reach more than 300,000 additional kids over four years.
- Continue Labor's commitment to the National Children's Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey. The Survey is a crucial tool for understanding how kids eat and move, but has not been conducted since 2007.
- Maintain the Goods and Services Tax (GST) exemptions for fresh food and vegetables.
- Start a conversation with States and Territories, the food industry and other stakeholders around junk food advertising to children.

Labor does not have any plans to introduce a sugar tax.

### **National Better Health Channel**

Labor believes that all Australians should be empowered to manage their own health. To do so, Australians need the best possible information on staying well, dealing with illness and injury, and navigating our health system.

Australians have access to more health and medical information than ever before. But the information available online is not always reliable or tailored. "Doctor Google" can be ineffective and even harmful, and finding and understanding the right information is difficult.

A Shorten Labor Government will invest \$50 million over four years to make the Victorian Better Health Channel the national health information platform. Under Labor, the Better Health Channel will become a nationwide health information platform that provides the health information that all Australians need, and links them to the services and supports available in their communities.

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Victoria's Better Health Channel ([www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)) was created in 1999 and has evolved into Australia's leading health website. It partners with dozens of trusted organisations to provide information that is reliable, up-to-date, locally relevant and easy to understand. This information covers:

- How to stay well and prevent disease.
- Common medical conditions and treatments.
- The health and medical services that are available to Victorians.

This content helps to answer our shared questions about health and medical care – like how to live a more healthy life, when to visit a GP or emergency department, who to call in the middle of the night, and what to expect when an illness or injury is diagnosed.

The Victorian Channel is already used across and beyond Australia. Much of its content can be built on to create a truly national health resource. Creating a national Better Health Channel will expand its reach and capacity to partner with local organisations. In particular, no matter where they live, Australians will be able to access localised information on health supports and services in their area.

Labor will also utilise the National Better Health Channel to further expand consumers' awareness of the Health Star Rating System. For example, the Channel will educate consumers about the System, and front-of-pack Star Ratings will direct consumers towards the Better Health Channel for additional information.

A national Better Health Channel cannot and will not replace care and advice provided by medical and allied health professionals. But based on input from those professionals, it will help all Australians to manage their own health and medical care.

### **Driving down smoking rates, particularly in at-risk communities**

Labor is proud of its record on reducing smoking. Successive Labor governments have banned tobacco advertising on TV and radio (1973), in newspapers and magazines (1989), and at sports grounds and other public places (1992).

The last Labor Government built on this record by introducing world-first plain packaging laws. Experts say that Labor's plain packaging is "a casebook example of effective tobacco control". Even the Coalition admits the reform is "achieving its aim of improving public health in Australia and is expected to have substantial public health outcomes into the future." Labor's leadership has created worldwide momentum, with Britain, Ireland and France introducing plain packaging, and dozens of countries set to follow.

Labor's fights for plain packaging and other tobacco control measures were not easy. We stood against the tobacco industry – and often the Coalition, which unlike Labor continues to accept donations from Big Tobacco.

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But the fights were worthwhile. In 1964, before Labor's first reforms, 58 per cent of men and 28 per cent of women in Australia smoked. Now, thanks to Labor's decades-long fight, just 15 per cent of Australians smoke daily.

But the fight is not yet over. 2.5 million Australians still smoke every day. Smoking kills 15,000 Australians a year, and remains one of the top three causes of disease. And the estimated annual cost of smoking to our health system and economy remains above \$30 billion a year.

### *Tackling smoking*

Labor will not rest on its record. As announced in November 2015, a Shorten Labor Government will continue to increase the tobacco excise from 1 July 2017, by 12.5 per cent a year for four years.

Labor's excise increases – which have now been copied by the Liberals – are the next step in tobacco control. More Australians will give up smoking under the excise increases.

But some population groups continue to smoke at alarming rates. More than 40 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults smoke – 2.6 times the non-Indigenous rate. Up to 35 per cent of Australians with a mental illness also smoke. And Australians are more likely to smoke if they live in rural or remote areas, or areas of socioeconomic disadvantage.

Ultimately, smoking causes health inequality. To Close the Gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, and help other at-risk populations, we must address a behaviour that leads directly to cancer and lung and heart diseases.

A Shorten Labor Government will commit \$50 million over four years to help vulnerable groups stop smoking. Based on expert advice, a Shorten Labor Government will invest \$20 million in a scaled-up National Tobacco Campaign. Under the Liberals, we have not had a mass media campaign for three years, and anti-smoking messages have dropped out of our media. In contrast, Labor's investment meets the recommendation of the Cancer Council, which says the campaign will "yield substantial reductions in smoking and related death and disease and associated short and long term costs to the health system".

Labor will also invest \$30 million in targeting at-risk populations such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and Australians with mental illness. Labor's investment will flow through Primary Health Networks (PHNs) and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs). Labor will develop national Guidelines to ensure its investment is directed at vulnerable populations and proven responses. But within those Guidelines, PHNs and ACCHOs will have flexibility to develop local solutions and commission local services. On-the-ground experience and expertise will help to target at-risk groups with tailored responses.

### **Reducing risky consumption of alcohol**

Some Australians drink at levels that put themselves and those around them at risk. More than one in four Australians binge drink at least once a month. This sort of consumption puts drinkers

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at higher risk of injury, brain and liver disease, and other chronic diseases like obesity. It also puts our families and communities at risk. 26 per cent of Australians say they have been a victim of an alcohol-related incident, like fearing for their safety or being assaulted.

Nationally, alcohol abuse is a problem that cannot be ignored. The Royal Australasian College of Physicians estimates that alcohol misuse causes 5,000 deaths and 150,000 hospitalisations every year. As well as the profound personal and social costs, the economic costs of this, including health care costs and lost productivity, have been estimated to be as high as \$36 billion a year.

Consistent with Labor's Platform, a Shorten Labor Government will develop a new National Alcohol Strategy. The Strategy will focus on evidence-based measures to prevent and reduce alcohol-related harms, including alcohol related violence. It will also focus on the riskiest behaviours, like binge drinking, and the most vulnerable populations, like Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and young Australians.

As part of the Strategy, Labor will strengthen work to limit alcohol advertising to children and work with state, territory and local government to reduce children's exposure in other settings.

Thank you again for the opportunity to outline Labor's policies for preventing chronic disease.

Yours sincerely,

**ALP Information Services Unit**

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