

CHRONIC DISEASE: FAILURE TO ACT CONTRIBUTING TO UNNECESSARY BURDEN

10 May 2016: A preventive health alliance has today called for all political parties to put prevention first in this election to reduce the rates of chronic disease.

The call comes as a new report released today finds 31 per cent of the nation's disease burden could be prevented with a greater investment in health prevention.

The report by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) shows that two thirds (66%) of the disease burden for Australia is from chronic diseases. And while the report shows the overall burden of disease has fallen between 2003 and 2011, it also indicates that the numbers could be much lower.

At least 31 per cent of the disease burden can be prevented if governments would target five modifiable risk factors; tobacco use (9%), high body mass (5.5%), alcohol use (5.1%), physical inactivity (5%) and high blood pressure (4.9%).

Prevention First spokesperson, Consumer Health Forum Chief Executive Officer, Leanne Wells, says the report makes clear that we can and should be doing much better.

"There is a very clear message for all political parties. This report finds Australia has improved overall health outcomes this century, showing that we can achieve much improved health outcomes if we put prevention first. If governments would step up preventive measures we could do much to reduce the staggering 31 per cent of preventable chronic disease," Ms Wells said.

Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education Chief Executive, Michael Thorn echoed those concerns and says governments must adopt the same approach to all risk factors as successfully applied to tobacco.

"Governments have taken a strong position on tackling tobacco use across Australia by increasing taxation and putting controls on availability and promotion. On tobacco, Australia is a world leader but has, up until now, been reluctant to tackle alcohol use, physical inactivity and unhealthy diet, that contribute so significantly to this burden," Mr Thorn said.

Ms Wells said Australia's health system needs to focus more on ensuring wellness in the first 50 years of life rather than being an illness-system where expenditure is focused on the later years of life.

"Governments are constantly talking about the need to reduce our burgeoning health costs, yet the reality is we are underinvesting in the area of prevention. In the lead up to the Federal Election, Australians deserve to know how the parties plan on tackling Australia's greatest health challenge," Ms Wells said.

Ms Wells and Mr Thorn (@MichaelTThorn) are available for interview.

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Prevention 1st is a new campaign by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) and the Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA), Consumer Health Forum of Australia and Alzheimer's Australia, calling on all Australian governments and political parties to commit to a strong preventive health agenda to tackle Australia's greatest health challenge. Prevention 1st will pursue every opportunity to express the need for action on public policy that the evidence shows will stop and prevent the rising burden of chronic disease.