

**MEDIA RELEASE****WITH \$3.3 BILLION BUDGET SAVINGS ON THE TABLE, PARLIAMENT  
URGED TO PUT PREVENTIVE HEALTH ON NATIONAL AGENDA**

**3 March 2017:** Leading health organisations are calling on the Commonwealth to address Australia's significant underinvestment in preventive health and set the national agenda to tackle chronic disease ahead of Labor's National Health Policy Summit today.

Chronic disease is Australia's greatest health challenge, yet many chronic diseases are preventable, with one third of cases traced to four modifiable risk factors: poor diet, tobacco use, physical inactivity and risky alcohol consumption.

Adopting preventive health measures would address significant areas flagged as critical by the both major parties, including ensuring universal access to world-class healthcare, preventing and managing chronic disease, reducing emergency department and elective surgery waiting times, and tackling health inequalities faced by Indigenous Australians.

Prevention 1st – a campaign led by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE), the Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA), Consumers Health Forum of Australia (CHF Australia), and Alzheimer's Australia – is urging the ALP to adopt the group's Pre-Budget submission recommendations as part of the party's key health policy framework.

FARE Chief Executive Michael Thorn says it is up to federal policymakers to address Australia's healthcare shortfalls and that Labor has the perfect opportunity to reignite its strong track record and lead the way in fixing the country's deteriorating investment in preventive healthcare.

"Australia's investment in preventive health is declining, despite chronic disease being the leading cause of illness in Australia. Chronic disease costs Australian taxpayers \$27 billion a year and accounts for more than a third of our national health budget. The ALP has both the opportunity and a responsibility as the alternate government to set the national agenda in the preventive healthcare space. Ultimately, however it falls to the Government of the day to show leadership on this issue." said Mr Thorn.

Recently the Government has spoken in favour of investment in preventive health.

In an address to the National Press Club in February this year, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull said, 'in 2017, a new focus on preventive health will give people the right tools and information to live active and healthy lives'. Health Minister Greg Hunt echoed that sentiment on 20 February announcing the Government was committed to tackling obesity.

Prevention 1st, however, argues the need for a more comprehensive, long-term approach to the problem

Its *Pre-Budget submission 2017-18*, Prevention 1st identifies a four-point action plan targeting key chronic disease risk factors.

Prevention 1st has called for Australia to phase out the promotion of unhealthy food and beverages, and for long overdue national public education campaigns to raise awareness of the risks associated with alcohol, tobacco, physical inactivity, and poor nutrition. Under the proposal, these measures would be supported by coordinated action across governments and increased expenditure on preventive health.

The costed plan also puts forward budget savings measures, recommending the use of corrective taxes to maximise the health and economic benefits to the community. Taxing products appropriate to their risk of harm will not only encourage healthier food and beverage choices but would generate much needed revenue – around \$3.3 billion annually.

With return on investment studies showing that small investments in prevention are cost-effective in both the short and longer terms, and the opportunity to contribute to happier and healthier communities, Consumers Health Forum of Australia Chief Executive Officer Leanne Wells urged both the Australian Government and Opposition to take advantage of the opportunity to stem the tide of chronic disease.

“There is an obvious benefit in adopting forward-thinking on preventive healthcare to reduce pressure on the health budget and the impact of preventable illness and injury on society,” Ms Wells said.

The ALP National Health Policy Summit will be held at Parliament House in Canberra on Friday 3 March.

**Mr Thorn and Ms Wells are available for interview.**

**Media contact:**

Jeremy Henderson      0425 559 710

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Prevention 1st is a campaign by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE), the Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA), Consumers Health Forum of Australia (CHF 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.