



Foundation for Alcohol
Research & Education

Media Release

PREVENTIVE HEALTH STALLED AT THE LIGHTS

27 August 2013: New analysis has highlighted the failure of the Government to properly implement preventive health measures to tackle alcohol harms.

Four years since the Preventative Health Taskforce released its final plan to tackle the health challenges caused by tobacco, alcohol and obesity, the Commonwealth Government has managed to complete only four of the 32 alcohol-related actions, progressed 18 and taken no action against the remaining 10.

Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) Chief Executive, Michael Thorn says despite the *National Preventative Health Taskforce Strategy* being dubbed a '*Roadmap for Action*', four years on from its release, not enough progress has been made in achieving the alcohol-specific recommendations.

"Sadly, when it comes to preventive health, the Rudd Government is stalled at the lights. For four years the Government has had a clear strategy at its disposal, ready and waiting to be implemented; an agenda for preventive health that the Government itself championed and endorsed, but then failed to adequately action," Mr Thorn said.

The Commonwealth first signalled its commitment to preventive health in 2007, announcing the National Preventative Health Taskforce to develop strategies to tackle tobacco, alcohol and obesity the following year. In responding to the Taskforce recommendations in 2010, the then Minister for Health, Nicola Roxon said, "*Australia has historically not invested enough effort and funding in preventing chronic and life threatening diseases*", going on to say that "*the Government is now embarking on a bold strategy for preventative health action.*"

This year's election campaign has shown scant regard for preventive health with the Australian National Preventive Health Agency (ANPHA) and Medicare Locals under threat from opposition health cuts.

However, the analysis, *A red light for preventive health: Assessing progress against the Preventative Health Strategy's alcohol-specific actions*, prepared by FARE, found the Government had failed to make any progress in many areas despite endorsing the Taskforce.

No measures have been undertaken to better inform Australians about safe levels of alcohol consumption, despite recommendations for a comprehensive and sustained social marketing and public education campaign.

The Government has also failed to protect children from alcohol advertising, with no effort made to phase out alcohol promotions from sporting broadcasts and cultural events likely to impact on children.

FARE's analysis also identified two significant weaknesses which contributed further to the failure to progress the Roadmap's recommendations: a lack of leadership and coordination, and no long-term vision.

Little or no progress was made in areas including developing coordinated approaches to liquor licencing legislation and supply to underage drinkers, which predominantly required cooperation between the Commonwealth Government and the States and Territories.

Mr Thorn is critical of many of the areas where actions have been progressed, highlighting that in many instances, while some progress has been made, much of the work undertaken is ad hoc or time-limited.

"The Government's achievements are few and far between and where it has had a small degree of success, such as ANPHA's 'Be the Influence' campaign, which it only funded to 2014, its efforts are completely undermined and undone by a lack of vision and long term commitment," Mr Thorn said.

FARE has written to the both the Government and opposition, seeking bipartisan support for three measures which would restart the Preventative Health Taskforce recommendations for alcohol; calling for an alcohol-focussed preventive health summit which would put preventive health back on the agenda, a commitment to funding the 'Be the Influence' campaign beyond 2014, and a 10 year commitment to a sustained public health education campaign.

"This report card identified Labor's failure to action the Taskforce's recommendations for alcohol. At best we got short term solutions for long term problems. It's not enough to have a robust roadmap for preventive health. It's not enough for governments to simply make claims about its commitment to preventive health. What we need is action. Looking beyond the election, I call on both major parties to show support for measures that would effectively reduce the nation's heavy alcohol toll," Mr Thorn said.

Michael Thorn (@MichaelThorn) is available for interview.

Media Contact: Jeremy Henderson 0425 559 710

Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) is an independent, charitable organisation working to prevent the harmful use of alcohol in Australia. Since 2001, FARE has invested over \$115 million in research and community projects to minimise the impact of alcohol misuse on Australians. Through its national grants program and commissioned research, FARE has established itself as a leading voice on alcohol and other drugs issues. FARE works with community groups, all levels of government, police, emergency workers, research institutions and the private sector to address alcohol-related problems. For further information visit FARE's website: www.fare.org.au @FAREAustralia