

# PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

## MEDIA RELEASE



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### TIME FOR ACTION ON PREVENTIVE HEALTH

#### *Australia: The Healthiest Country by 2020*

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) has welcomed today's release of the *National Preventative Health Taskforce* discussion paper, which outlines a series of ambitious targets for improving the health of Australians. The discussion paper also sets out a broader vision for making Australia the healthiest country in the world by the year 2020.

The PHAA recognises the importance of this discussion paper but also emphasises that it should not be used as a reason for delay. It is time for action. Governments are well placed to take the next steps on alcohol, tobacco and obesity but it will only happen if there is a considerable increase in the percentage of health budgets that go to prevention. The present allocation to prevention by all Australian governments is simply inadequate.

"It is particularly exciting to see the Australian Government supporting the goals of the *National Preventative Health Taskforce*, given that preventive health activities only receive 2% of our overall health spend. It is estimated that anti-smoking measures prevented over 400,000 premature deaths between 1975 and 1995, also saving taxpayers \$8.4 billion. Preventive health measures save lives and money – that's a great investment in anyone's language," said Michael Moore, Chief Executive Officer of the PHAA.

"What is really pleasing is that the discussion paper outlines a series of concrete targets for improving the health of Australians by the year 2020, including: reversing the rises in overweight and obesity to the extent of halving the incidence; reducing rates of daily smoking to 9% or less; reducing harmful drinking by 30%; and contributing to closing the 17-year life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. These are ambitious targets but it is important to set concrete goals and the Taskforce has also developed a range of strategies and tangible actions designed to achieve these outcomes.

"The discussion paper also highlights the growing divide between the health outcomes of rich and poor Australians and acknowledges the disadvantages faced by people living in rural, regional and remote communities. Australian culture and values demand a 'fair go' for all, but unfortunately this has increasingly not been the reality. An important part of prevention entails addressing the social determinants of health and re-instating a level playing field in which all Australians can enjoy equal access to a healthy life. The establishment of a National Prevention Agency to drive the agenda should ensure that the grand vision is brought to fruition.

"Community consultations on the discussion paper will be held across the country between now and February 2009: giving communities a chance to have their say. The PHAA welcomes the release of the discussion paper and looks forward to contributing to the plans to make Australia the healthiest nation on earth by 2020," added Mr Moore.

#### **For further information/comment:**

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