



MEDIA RELEASE



Health in Schools Must be a Priority

Health authorities have urged that health and physical education must be priority in the new Australian schools' curriculum.

Leading health organisations have written to Federal Education Minister Julia Gillard and all State and Territory Education Ministers ahead of their meeting in Melbourne tomorrow pressing for Health and Physical Education (HPE) to be added to the crucial first two stages of the national curriculum, with a minimum 150 minutes a week of physical activity and 80 minutes of health.

The first stages currently are English, mathematics, science, history, geography, languages and the arts, but HPE is not a priority and there is no reliable information on how or whether it is taught in schools around the country.

Chair of the National Preventative Health Taskforce Professor Rob Moodie said, "recent trends predict that the life expectancy for Australian children alive today will fall two years by the time they are 20 years old because of obesity. This is an awful legacy for us to leaving our children. Schools are an essential part of developing a healthier and more active Australia. If health and physical education are not priorities in our schools then they won't be priorities in everyday Australian life."

Cancer Council Australia CEO Professor Ian Olver said: “Behaviours learned in adolescence can affect our children’s risk of developing cancer prematurely in adulthood. If the arts are important enough to be in the curriculum’s priority stages, surely health education should be there too. We must ensure that our children are encouraged to be physically active in the face of the obesity epidemic and that they learn about healthy eating and the risks of tobacco and alcohol.”

Public Health Association of Australia President Professor Mike Daube said, “We recognize the pressures on the curriculum – but the reality is that if health is not in the first stages – at least as important as the arts – it will be seen as a minor issue. Schools are critical to promoting health. A quarter of our children are overweight or obese, drinking patterns among young people are cause for alarm and our children face health problems much more complex than those of earlier generations. The education system must not put health and physical activity in the “too hard” basket.”

The call to action by Education Ministers has come from:

Australian Council for Health, Physical Activity and Recreation (Chair – Graeme Quelch), Australian Medical Association (President – Dr Andrew Pesce), Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (Chair - Professor Fiona Stanley), Cancer Council Australia (CEO - Professor Ian Olver), National Heart Foundation (CEO - Dr Lyn Roberts), National Preventative Health Taskforce (Chair - Professor Rob Moodie), Public Health Association of Australia (President - Professor Mike Daube).

ENDS

For further information:

Professor Ian Olver (CEO, Cancer Council of Australia) – 0409 456 727

Professor Mike Daube (President, PHAA) - 0409 933 933

Professor Rob Moodie (Chair, National Preventative Health Taskforce) - 0413 838 657

Attachment:

Letter (to Minister Gillard)

see below:



The Hon Julia Gillard MP
 Deputy Prime Minister
 Minister for Education
 PO Box 6022
 House of Representatives
 Parliament House ACT 2600
Julia.Gillard.MP@aph.gov.au



Dear Ms Gillard

We understand that the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) is scheduled to meet in Melbourne on Thursday, April 15. We are writing to you and State and Territory Ministers for Education to request that at this meeting you consider and support the proposal that Health and Physical Education (HPE) be included as a priority in the new Australian K-10 curriculum.

We recognise that there will always be pressures on the curriculum. We are, however, deeply concerned that the well-being of our young people is under threat from a wide range of health problems.

You will be aware of growing concerns about issues such as chronic disease, alcohol, tobacco and drug problems, injury prevention, mental health and the rising tide of obesity. Approximately a quarter of our children are already overweight or obese, and even if current trends get no worse, the life expectancy for Australia children alive today will fall two years by the time they are 20 years old. This is a legacy that we should not leave our children, and the education system has a vital role to play in addressing these issues.

We understand that the first stage of the new Australian Curriculum includes English, mathematics, science and history, while the second stage includes geography, languages and the arts. HPE is recognised as a learning area for consideration, but has no such priority. There is also no currently reliable information about how much and how well HPE is implemented in schools around the country. We are, however, aware that there is a strong national consensus amongst those working in the HPE area that would lead to a smooth development process with strong support.

Schools have a critical role to play in equipping young Australians with the necessary knowledge, attitudes and skills to lead healthy active lives and in developing behaviours that will keep them healthy well beyond

their school years. A high priority for health and physical education in schools has been recommended by the National Preventative Health Task Force, and the Crawford Report on Sport and Recreation. We believe that there would be very strong community support for health and physical education to be in the first or second stages of the new Australian Curriculum, with at least the same priority as the arts.

It would be very disappointing if HPE were left to a third phase of the curriculum which is clearly of lower priority and yet to be developed.

We also note the special importance of health and physical education in schools for disadvantaged populations. Given the wealth of evidence on the contribution of preventable death and disease to the Aboriginal life expectancy gap, HPE as a priority in schools would play a vital role in supporting many of the Close the Gap objectives.

We therefore seek your support for the following commitments:

- Inclusion of the health and physical education learning area within stage two of the Australian curriculum for K-10 students.
- A minimum 150 minutes per week of physical education for all K-10 students.
- A minimum 80 minutes per week of health education for all K-10 students.

Our organisations would be very happy to provide any assistance in support of these proposals which we believe to be of vital importance for the health of our children.

Yours sincerely



Professor Mike Daube
President
PHAA



Graeme Quelch
President
ACHPER



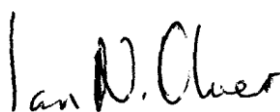
Dr Lyn Roberts AM
CEO
Heart Foundation



Professor Rob Moodie
Chair, Preventative
Health Taskforce



Dr Andrew Pesce
President
AMA



Professor Ian Olver
CEO
Cancer Council Australia



Professor Fiona Stanley
Chair
ARACY

CC Hon Nicola Roxon MP, Minister for Health and Ageing
State and Territory Ministers for Education