

HEALTHY WA – THE HIDDEN HEALTH SERVICE NEEDS CONTINUED SUPPORT

The remarkable longevity and good health of Western Australians are a tribute to the State's outstanding record in public health over many years, alongside world class health services, according to the Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA).

PHAA President Professor Mike Daube, of Curtin University, said, "The report of the West Australian Chief Health Officer, released today, highlights the remarkable contribution public health – the hidden health service - has made to our health and well-being. At the beginning of the last century, life expectancy was in the mid-50s. Now we can expect to live to 80 and beyond – and to enjoy a healthy old age as we get there.'

"As this report shows, overall, health and longevity in WA are pretty much as good as it gets."

"While the public focus is often on hospitals and the immediate services people want, the public health programs that have done so much for our longevity are generally out of sight. They are often unnoticed because they apply to populations not individuals – and the benefits of prevention are not immediately visible. Yet these are the hidden health services that keep us alive and keep us healthy: they deserve more attention and funding."

"From basic sanitation and food hygiene to immunisation, disease control and health promotion, over the years public health has made a massive contribution to increasing our lifespan. Yet prevention still attracts only around 2% of national health expenditure – a figure recently described by the Prime Minister as 'crazy'."

"There are still enormous challenges ahead for public health. If we fail to stem the obesity epidemic, our children face a reduced life expectancy – which would be an appalling legacy to leave them. Tobacco still kills 1200 Western Australians each year. Alcohol problems – and drinking patterns among young people – are a grave concern. We face constant new environmental threats. The Indigenous life expectancy gap still shames us all. And there are many other areas where a population focus could reap great dividends."

Professor Daube concluded,

"The Health Department is to be congratulated on publishing this first report of the Chief Health Office. It notes the important complementary roles of medical and surgical treatment and prevention, and clearly sets out the achievements and the challenges. WA has often led the nation, sometimes the world, in its prevention programs. As well as strong hospitals and health services, we need a continuing and increased emphasis nationally and locally on action that we know can keep us healthy and prolong our lives and those of our children."

ENDS

For further information/comment:

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