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Political donations undermine public health

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) will discuss how donations to political parties undermine Australian democracy and public health at today's hearing of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters. The Committee is currently conducting an Inquiry into the funding of political parties and election campaigns.

"PHAA is committed to fairer health outcomes for all Australians. It has become clear to us that inappropriate commitment of political donations provides an incentive to political parties to focus on the interests of business sometimes at the cost of community health. The clearest indication of this is that so many business donors contribute equally to the two major parties – providing an indication that they do not favour one ideology over another but seek to purchase political influence," said Michael Moore, PHAA Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

"A key element in the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion – a fundamental health promotion document – is the importance of empowerment of individuals and groups within society. Anything that undermines the power of individuals and groups within society and particularly those who are socio-economically disadvantaged, undermines public health. It is therefore important that PHAA plays a role in seeking to ensure the most effective democratic processes.

"The reforms already made in the NSW Parliament are an acknowledgement of the inappropriate influence that large donations have on the political process. And it is not just the so-called 'sin industries' - gambling, tobacco and alcohol - the mining industry demonstrated its influence just prior to the last Federal election and the same is true for developers, banks and foreign investors. Similar electoral reform should be adopted in every jurisdiction and particularly with leadership at the Federal level so that Australians can trust in a genuinely fair and equitable democracy," said Mr Moore.

PHAA has recommended the Committee considers solutions that specifically address:

- **Limiting expenditure on elections** - to prevent escalating needs for further electoral funding;
- **Purchasing influence** - disclosure, conflicts of interest, donations to parties and MP centred political fundraisers; and
- **Clear and timely declarations to the electoral commission** - removing the loopholes illustrated by the gap in expenditure compared to the amounts declared.

"Further, PHAA recommends the Committee use the NSW legislation as a starting point in forming recommendations that provide a block to this system that undermines our democracy," said Mr Moore.

For further information/comment

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