

Health Debate

What happened to Prevention?

23 March 2010

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) is disappointed that the Rudd-Abbott debate hardly touched on prevention and other areas such as mental health, chronic disease, ageing and remedying inequities.

PHAA President Professor Mike Daube said, "Hospitals dominate our expenditure and we need good treatment services; but public health can prolong our lives, keep us healthy and reduce inequalities in our society. It is too important to ignore".

"We need clear commitments from both sides on prevention now, so we know what they will do to prevent the hundreds of thousands of premature deaths that will occur in the absence of action. The Prime Minister touched on this issue, and the Government has generated some important initiatives, but prevention is much too important to sit on the sidelines of health of debates.

The PHAA believes that we need a special debate specifically on prevention and reducing inequities in health.

PHAA CEO, Michael Moore, said "We recognise that political interests demand a focus on hospitals and we do recognise the importance of restructuring our hospital system. However, the reality is that so much can be achieved with strong policies on prevention. The government has received the report of the Preventative Health Taskforce with an initial focus tobacco, alcohol and obesity but the issues were hardly touched on during this debate.

"The Government deserves credit for recognising the importance of prevention, and for committing significant funding even in difficult economic times. Some of that funding is directed towards the Australian *National Preventive Health Agency* – but the Agency Bill has not received high enough priority in the Senate to allow the establishment before the middle of this year at the very earliest. This is vital legislation for anyone who is serious about keeping all Australians healthy and particularly the most vulnerable of our people" he added.

"More than anything - this debate was an opportunity missed. Prevention still only gets a derisory 2% of national health spend. This is something that now needs to be addressed urgently," Mr Moore concluded.

For further information/comment:

Professor Mike Daube, President, PHAA

Michael Moore, CEO, PHAA

0409 933 933

0417 249 731