

SENATE MUST ACT TO PREVENT CANCER, HEART DISEASE, DIABETES

The Public Health Association of Australia is urging all sides of politics to ensure that legislation to establish the Australian National Preventive Health Agency (ANPHA) passes through the Senate as speedily as possible.

The ANPHA Bill was introduced in September 2009, passed through the House of Representatives and was introduced into the Senate in October of last year. However, it has not yet passed through the Senate. It establishes an agency to coordinate and oversee national preventive health activities and programs, in vital areas such as obesity, tobacco and alcohol.

Establishing a National Preventive Health Agency was a key recommendation of the National Preventive Health Taskforce and the Hospital and Health Reform Commission. It has been allocated funding of \$133.2million over four years. The money includes allocation of \$102 million to tackle smoking and obesity through national marketing campaigns and \$13.1 million for preventive health research.

PHAA President Professor Mike Daube said, "It will be a tragedy for the nation's health if this Bill is left in limbo. All sides agree on the importance of prevention. We know that strong preventive action could avert the early deaths of literally hundreds of thousands of Australians. It will also assist in preventing so much of the burden of diseases such as cancer, heart disease and diabetes that add yet further pressures to our health care system. Only this week a major report reported in the Lancet Online shows that ten risk factors are associated with 90% of the risk of stroke – and most of these will be addressed by the new Agency."

If we can simply stabilise trends in overweight and obesity – simply halting the increase – we can prevent the premature deaths of 500,000 Australians by the year 2050. Tobacco still kills more than 15,000 Australians each year; and there is rising community concern about problems caused by alcohol, especially among young people.

The new National Preventive Health Agency will provide a boost for prevention but will be able to enhance desperately needed national direction and coordination.

Failure to pass the Bill will send out a catastrophic signal to the community and health professionals that there is no support for prevention – and that many will Australians will continue to die early.

ENDS

For further information/comment:

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