

MEDIA RELEASE

ADDRESS: PO BOX 319, CURTIN ACT 2605 TELEPHONE: 02 6285 2373 FAX: 02 6282 5438 EMAIL phaa@phaa.net.au

WEDNESDAY 9 May 2007

NOTHING FOR THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC HEALTH

“Last night’s budget is an opportunity tragically missed for public health” said Pieta Laut, Executive Director of the Public Health Association of Australia.

Ms Laut said, “In these times of budget surplus, high employment and a future of increasing health costs, the budget has all but ignored prevention and has failed to put in place health promotion and education programs that would lead to greater health for Australians and lower health care cost in the future.”

“In a time of plenty, public health has been allocated to an era of famine. This budget has wasted a perfect opportunity to commit to improving the health of all Australians.”

“Despite the Government’s rhetoric of commitment to prevention, public health’s share of governmental expenditure remains at a paltry 2.5%. This is an opportunity tragically lost.”

“We all know that the worst health in Australia is experienced by Australia’s Indigenous people. In contrast to the AMA and Indigenous health groups’ call for \$400million, the budget’s two measures that actually address health in these communities totalling \$75million over four years is perhaps best described as token. Funding for primary health care in only six rural and remote regions across Australia is hardly the provision of comprehensive primary health care services,” said Dr. Jane Freemantle, Vice President [Policy] of the Public Health Association.

Dr. Freemantle added, “The Oral Health initiative does not address prevention or community education and is woefully inadequate in addressing the current short fall of access for the poorest members of our community to oral health services. The services are not means tested and this measure runs the risk of becoming middle class welfare for orthodontists.”

Professor Mike Daube, Vice President [Development] said “The Budget has failed in the crucial area of public education to promote health and prevent disease. “

“While the Government brings in more than \$12 billion in revenue from tobacco and alcohol, it spends less than half a percent of this on public education to promote health.”

Professor Daube said, “The measures announced to address obesity are desperately disappointing. This most pressing health priority gets a long-overdue survey, a plan, and a few community and school grants.” The previously announced type 2 diabetes initiative is largely focused at GPs, requires payments by the consumer, and will do little to change attitudes in the community.”

“It is staggering that a giveaway Budget with a \$10 billion surplus has done so little to combat the obesity epidemic.”

“The Australian Government has fallen well short of needs and expectations in public health with this budget. We need a stronger focus on prevention, education and early intervention and clearly need to focus the Commonwealth’s efforts on helping those with the greatest need. This health budget does not deliver,” Ms Laut concluded.

For further information Contact: Ms Pieta Laut 02 6285 2373
Professor Mike Daube 0409 933 933

The Public Health Association is a non-party-political organisation with a membership drawn from more than 40 health-related professions. The Association makes a major contribution to health policy in Australia and has branches in every State and Territory.