Public Health Association of Australia
submission on Sustainable Health Review (WA) – interim report

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Preamble

The Public Health Association of Australia

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) is recognised as the principal non-government organisation for public health in Australia working to promote the health and well-being of all Australians. It is the pre-eminent voice for the public’s health in Australia.

The PHAA works to ensure that the public’s health is improved through sustained and determined efforts of the Board, the National Office, the State and Territory Branches, the Special Interest Groups and members.

The efforts of the PHAA are enhanced by our vision for a healthy Australia and by engaging with like-minded stakeholders in order to build coalitions of interest that influence public opinion, the media, political parties and governments.

Health is a human right, a vital resource for everyday life, and key factor in sustainability. Health equity and inequity do not exist in isolation from the conditions that underpin people’s health. The health status of all people is impacted by the social, cultural, political, environmental and economic determinants of health. Specific focus on these determinants is necessary to reduce the unfair and unjust effects of conditions of living that cause poor health and disease. These determinants underpin the strategic direction of the Association.

All members of the Association are committed to better health outcomes based on these principles.

Vision for a healthy population

A healthy region, a healthy nation, healthy people: living in an equitable society underpinned by a well-functioning ecosystem and a healthy environment, improving and promoting health for all.

Mission for the Public Health Association of Australia

As the leading national peak body for public health representation and advocacy, to drive better health outcomes through increased knowledge, better access and equity, evidence informed policy and effective population-based practice in public health.
Introduction

PHAA welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Sustainable Health Review in Western Australia. The reduction of social and health inequities should be an over-arching goal of national policy and recognised as a key measure of our progress as a society. The Australian Government, in collaboration with the States/Territories, should provide a comprehensive national cross-government framework on promoting a healthy ecosystem and reducing social and health inequities. All public health activities and related government policy should be directed towards reducing social and health inequity nationally and, where possible, internationally.

PHAA Response to the Interim Report

Direction 1: Keep people healthy and get serious about prevention and health promotion

PHAA WA Branch strongly supports Direction 1.

Promotion of a healthy and supportive environment for health and wellbeing is an important strategy in preventing chronic disease and contributing to a sustainable health system. In our submission to the Review, PHAA WA recommended that the WA Government recognise the important role of prevention in the health system and invest in the area accordingly.

It appears that this recommendation has been considered in the Interim Report. It is excellent that the report has recognised that being overweight or obese, tobacco use and excessive drinking are leading causes of preventable hospital admissions. PHAA WA also agrees with the discussion within the report about addressing the social determinants of health, including through partnerships.

While we support Direction 1 and the key issues identified within it, we believe the recommendations for immediate action and areas for further work could better reflect the key issues identified. There is good evidence for what works to prevent harm from alcohol and tobacco. Effective strategies have been identified in various reports, including for example the National Preventive Health Strategy report Australia: The healthiest country by 2020 – the roadmap for action.

The Sustainable Health Review should identify state-based actions that the National Preventive Health Strategy recommends to address alcohol and tobacco harm, and commit to taking action on these, in addition to the recommendation included about working to address childhood obesity. The Review should encourage implementation of evidence-based strategies to address these risk factors.

We understand that public health prevention funding is subject to normal budgetary processes. However, the Review should identify clear targets for increasing public health prevention funding, particularly as it has identified that the proportion of funding allocated to public health has been declining. We recommend the Interim Report also include clear timeframes and targets for action to enable progress to be monitored.
Direction 6: Develop partnerships for Aboriginal health outcomes

PHAA WA strongly supports Direction 6 and the focus on developing partnerships for Aboriginal health outcomes.

The Panel has appropriately identified that providing culturally competent care to Aboriginal people is vital, and improving the cultural competency of health services can increase Aboriginal people’s access to health care, increase the effectiveness of health care, and improve health outcomes. The focus on continuing to build the Aboriginal health workforce is an important inclusion.

PHAA WA would recommend Direction 6 have a greater focus on the importance of support and funding for Aboriginal Controlled Community Health Organisations (ACCHOs) as the preferred provider of health services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people wherever possible. While the Interim Report does include ACCHOs as one of the key stakeholders who should be involved in active partnerships for a collaborative approach to funding and service delivery, a greater emphasis on their importance in health service delivery should be placed in the report. As PHAA WA noted in our submission to the Review, ACCHOs have a vital and important role in the health care of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; being community controlled, they are uniquely placed to provide culturally appropriate care to local communities.

Direction 9: Harness and support health and medical research, collaboration and innovation

PHAA WA strongly supports the Interim Report’s focus on generating policy-relevant research and driving research translation into health.

The Interim Report notes that one of the four main categories of research is public health research, which develops and improves disease prevention programs. While the Interim Report has a strong focus on the importance of prevention and health promotion for a sustainable health system, there is limited discussion on the importance of public health research.

Direction 9 should include further detail on public health research, and note that for research funding to contribute to a sustainable health system, it should encompass all areas of health with a focus on public health, prevention and the social determinants of health.

Direction 10 – Develop a supported and flexible workforce

To create a sustainable health sector and workforce, professions other than accredited health practitioners need more opportunities to be upskilled and trained in emerging health trends and evidence, best practice guidelines/standards and training (e.g Mental Health First Aid, ASIST Training, Open Closets Training).

Having a workforce that continually attends accredited training will support staff to make well informed decisions for patients, clients and communities.

One option is to award CPD (Continuing Professional Development) points through training, workshops and/or seminars to non-medical practitioners such as health promotion professionals, mental health professionals, counsellors and social workers and various others. Awarding CPD points makes participating in workshops, seminars and training more attractive to health professionals which may result in a more engaged, skilled and supported workforce that is adaptable and flexible to changing work environments and, health trends and priorities.
Conclusion

PHAA supports the broad directions of the Sustainable Health Review in Western Australia. We strongly support Directions 1, 6, and 9. We are particularly keen that the following points are highlighted:

- The Review should identify clear state-based actions from the National Preventive Health Strategy to address alcohol and tobacco harm, as well as childhood obesity
- The Review should have a greater focus on Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations as preferred providers
- The Review should outline detail on the requirement for research on public health, prevention and the determinants of health.

The PHAA appreciates the opportunity to make this submission and the opportunity to contribute to the Sustainable Health Review in Western Australia.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require additional information or have any queries in relation to this submission.

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