Re-appointed Health Minister Greg Hunt urged to keep his word

The Public Health Association of Australia welcomes the re-appointment of Greg Hunt as Health Minister and notes that he acknowledged ahead of the election campaign that health prevention had not been a major focus of his time as minister.

At the post-budget health breakfast in April, Greg Hunt vowed to make prevention a focus should he win government.

PHAA, Australia’s pre-eminent public health advocacy body, will hold Minister Hunt to account, seeking to work constructively with him and the Morrison government to boost cost-effective prevention and health promotion measures.

“Commonwealth spending on health is up, but with an ageing population and the growth of chronic disease, the current focus on health through the prism of hospitals and drugs is unsustainable and must be revisited,” PHAA CEO Terry Slevin said.

“What are governments for but to advance the health and wellbeing of all citizens?” asks Mr Slevin.

PHAA would like to see greater effort on --

- Promoting the benefits of a healthy diet and physical activity to tackle chronic illness, namely obesity
- Reducing junk food advertising and alcohol advertising to children
- Pre-empting climate change-related illness in the face of more floods and droughts
- Reduce cancer and heart disease causing smoking and alcohol consumption

It would rely on courage to stave off the massive influence of junk food and alcohol industries.

It would rely on the Commonwealth to engage and be inspired by the states - who are leading the way on prevention, and the wisdom to look at what other evidence points to, so as to ensure we develop the best possible policy settings.

“We will continue to pursue a common-good ambition to see every Australian’s health improved regardless of their wealth and capacity to pay,” Mr Slevin said.

Australia is in the grip of a number of silent epidemics. The facts are these:

- A quarter of the nation’s children are overweight or obese. Australia’s expanding waistlines are weighing down on life expectancy rates.
- One in two Australians have a chronic disease (11 million Australians according to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare).

At least 30% of cases are preventable. There are a number of easy reforms Australia can make to stem the tide, and at relatively low cost compared with the high cost of medicines and hospital treatment.
Australia spends less than 2% of its total health budget on prevention which is well below the average among OECD nations.

We call on the re-elected Morrison government to commit to building this investment with the target of investing 5% of all health dollars in prevention and public health.

Further, PHAA congratulates Ken Wyatt on being promoted to Minister for Indigenous Affairs, as the first Indigenous Australian to be Indigenous Affairs Minister.

We look forward to working with Minister Wyatt in his new portfolio to address gross health inequities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

ENDS

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