Launch of Parliamentary Friends of Preventive Health

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) is proud to support the establishment today of the new Parliamentary Friends of Preventive Health to bridge a gap between evidence that supports cost-effective prevention and health policy that remains skewed to high-end clinical care.

“Australia is facing an enormous and anticipated wave of chronic disease that will cost us in the long term,” PHAA CEO Terry Slevin said.

“Given that, I’m delighted that this new group of parliamentary backbenchers will be active in dealing with public health issues during this term of parliament, aiming to keep health prevention top of mind for decision makers.”

The cross-bench group was today launched at Parliament House in Canberra by three co-chairs who together have experience in primary health care and public health research: The Hon Dr Kate Allen (Liberal Member for Higgins), the Hon Dr Mike Freelander (Labor Member for Macarthur) and the Hon Dr Helen Haines (Independent Member for Indi).

The co-chairs said they were honoured to assist in the group’s formation and that they seek to make a difference to reduce chronic disease and optimise the health for all Australians with a wholistic approach to prevention.

Dr Haines said, “Preventative health starts at preconception, throughout pregnancy and the early years when a child is given the best start in life with breastfeeding and through her parents avoiding smoking, excessive alcohol and maintaining a healthy weight through good nutrition and exercise.

“Preventative health continues right through to old age by practising these same healthy habits established in childhood. Education is paramount to preventative health as is social inclusion and a global awareness of environmental factors such as climate change, gender equality, civil unrest and poverty.”

Dr Freelander said pressure on the health budget can be eased if more health prevention measures are adopted:

“Governments of all persuasions have neglected public health in the past, and it is vitally important that our public health care system is supported with sounds preventative health policies for the sake of future generations.

“Early intervention, through policies such as the First 1000 Days program, is key to improving the health outcomes of Australian children into the future, and it is my hope that this group will play a significant role in championing initiatives such as this,” Dr Freelander said.

Dr Allen said, “As a population health scientist I understand the need to raise awareness about preventive health to curb non communicable diseases. It’s groups like these that can really make a difference to policy and legislation.”
The group, which has a membership of 18 parliamentarians, will be a forum for sharing information and solutions about ways of preventing all forms of illness across the Australian community.

Mr Slevin added, “Prevention is the foundation of good health policy as it is always better than cure, but federal health funding on preventive health still comes in at less than 2% of the national health budget.”

At the launch this afternoon, leader of the Australian Greens, Richard di Natale lent his support to the newly formed group:

“All strength to you. There is so much we can do. This should not be a politically contested space,” he said.

PHAA has also today released a Pivot for Prevention vision statement which recommends a framework for prevention at the federal level.

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For further information/comment:
Terry Slevin, CEO of the Public Health Association Australia 0419 901 599 tslevin@phaa.net.au
Media contact: Toni Hassan 0426 207 726