Will this election improve the health of Territorians?

Health is everyone’s business and should not have to compete with the economy. In this election there is plenty of choice in candidates and the Public Health Association NT Branch is keen to know where parties stand before Territorians go to the polls on 22nd August.

Dr Suzanne Belton, President of the NT Branch said, “We are asking Party Leaders to put some thought into letting us and the public know whether they will invest in prevention in health care. Over the years there has been a reduction in spending on prevention in health with money flowing to the end stages of disease and illness.

Only 1.7% of Australia’s health spending is on prevention, far less than other countries. This low commitment to prevention is causing a build-up of future illness including heart disease, diabetes, other chronic conditions, and cancer, accompanied by economic costs from lower workforce participation and productivity.”

Dr Rosalie Schulz, Vice President of the NT Branch said that she was concerned with a healthy environment for all Territorians. She said, “Climate change poses significant short and long-term risks to the health of Territorians. Despite the substantial body of scientific evidence highlighting these risks, and growing evidence that climate change represents a ‘health emergency’, health is hardly recognised in Australia’s climate change mitigation and adaptation policy and strategy. Renewable energy is now more cost-effective than traditional energy sources.”

Dr Nick Georges a public health registrar and member of the NT Branch felt that people but especially children needed to be protected from tobacco, alcohol, and junk food promotion in advertising. He said, “Advertising unhealthy food and beverages to children influences lifelong food choices, which could condemn them to overweight and obesity, shortening lives. Exposure to media showing tobacco and alcohol can lead to normalisation and early uptake of harmful practices. NT has begun key alcohol reforms leading to reduced hospital admissions, family violence and other crime. Ongoing commitment is needed to protect these achievements.”

Dr Michael Fonda, a rural specialist GP and member of the NT Branch noted that strengthening primary health care was very important. He said, “Primary health care is the cornerstone of an effective health system and the best setting for preventative health care and chronic disease management. Strengthening primary health care and management of risk factors for chronic diseases now is an effective means of slowing the progression of these diseases and limiting their substantial hospital costs in the future.”

Philip McMahon, an experienced nurse and member of the NT Branch wanted to highlight the importance of Aboriginal people’s health, youth and noted the lack of a men’s health policy in the NT. He said, “Improving Aboriginal health entails focus on adolescents and co-designing targeted programs with Aboriginal expertise. These could improve health and address suicide, and alcohol and other drug use. A
men’s health plan would coordinate programs on men’s health, achieving crossover benefits with adolescent health including in mental health, health literacy and healthy lifestyles.”

The PHAA NT Branch understands that for some candidates these ideas are new, but if they want to get votes then they need to think about health seriously and have policies with budgets. The Public Health Association of Australia has evidence-based policies available on their website, which are useful. Party Leaders and Independent candidates are welcome to use them as guides or to seek out expert assistance themselves.

The full letter is available to download from the national PHAA website.

-ENDS-

Media Contacts

Dr Suzanne Belton President NT Branch  phaantbranc@gmail.com  0416 113 233

Dr Rosalie Schultz Vice President NT Branch  0429 358 095

Public Health Association of Australia – NT Branch

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) is a non-party political organisation that advocates for public health and the reduction of social and health inequities (https://www.phaa.net.au/). Public health goes beyond hospital care to examine the policies and processes that determine individual and population health. It encompasses areas as wide-ranging as health system reform, service planning for ageing, disaster response, chronic disease prevention and management, mental health, refugee health, injury prevention and tobacco control. It focuses on advocacy, evidence-based policy and knowledge sharing.