



# Australian Health Care Reform Alliance

C/- PO Box 280 Deakin West ACT 2600 ABN 64 051 645 674  
[www.healthreform.org.au](http://www.healthreform.org.au)

## **AHCRA Submission to the Senate Inquiry into personal choice and community impacts**

18 September 2015

The Australian Health Care Reform Alliance (AHCRA) welcomes the opportunity to submit this brief response to the Senate Standing Committee on Economics.

AHCRA is a longstanding alliance of significant national and state peak bodies\* comprising health professionals, consumers and services. It aims to promote an equitable health system with a greater emphasis on prevention and primary health care.

AHCRA considers that the key points it wishes to make, in relation to the terms of reference of the Committee, have been made very clearly in the submission from the Public Health Association of Australia. AHCRA therefore strongly supports their submission and urges the Committee to consider it seriously. (It is attached for ease of reference.)

In particular, AHCRA emphasises the following points.

- AHCRA believes the community does generally expect its governments to take responsibility for protecting the health and safety of the community (e.g. to reduce the road toll), and to place the interests of public health ahead of those of vested interests (e.g. to ban asbestos and to protect children from harmful products such as tobacco).
- The community's duty of care towards young people, who have often not fully developed a capacity to make fully informed choices about potentially harmful activities.
- There are increasing inequities in health status between socioeconomic groups in Australia that disadvantage the most vulnerable people in our communities. Governments must take more responsibility for promoting equitable access to quality health care and outcomes, otherwise Australia will not only become less fair but also less productive, more fragmented and less safe. A current example of socio economic inequality is the rollout of the cashless Basics Card – a discriminatory policy that needs to stop.
- Much of the inequities in care can be attributed to the social determinants of health that affect health status more than the standard of health care available. Governments need to take these factors much more seriously and address them across different portfolios and levels of government. The economic determinants are among the reasons why some of the issues under consideration in this Inquiry are so important.
- The need to acknowledge the significant positive impact of previous and current public health activities in saving many, many thousands of lives and improving Australian quality of life.

- The importance of the Nuffield Bioethics Board’s concept of a stewardship model. This implies that the overall aim of government actions should be to ‘achieve desired health outcomes while minimising restrictions on people’s freedom’, achieving a ‘balance between acceptable public health goals and limitations on coercion and intrusiveness’.
- The importance of taking into account the dominance of some interests in influencing individual decisions (e.g. through extensive promotion and advertising) compared to people’s access to independent information about the choices they wish to make (e.g. around smoking, alcohol use, etc). Governments do have the legitimate responsibility in imposing restrictions or applying polices to counter undue dominance and to facilitate programs that enable citizens to make well-informed choices.
- The significant impact that some people’s decisions have on the rest of the community, e.g. when drink driving causes the deaths or injury to other people, through passive smoking, or via the often ongoing and expensive cost of providing health care to people with smoking-induced cancer or other affliction.

## Contact

AHCRA Chair: Tony McBride  
 chair@healthreform.org.au

0407 531 468

## Attachment

- Public Health Association of Australia Submission

## \* AHCRA membership

Allied Health Professions Australia  
 Audiology Australia  
 Australian College of Nurse Practitioners  
 Australian Council of Social Service  
 Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations  
 Australian Health Promotion Association  
 Australian Society of Physician Assistants  
 Australian Wound Management Association  
 Catholic Health Australia  
 Centre for Clinical Governance Research in Health  
 Chiropractors' Association of Australia  
 Chronic Illness Alliance  
 Continence Foundation of Australia  
 Doctors Reform Society  
 Family Planning Victoria  
 Health Care Consumers' Association (ACT)  
 Health Consumers of Rural and Remote Australia  
 Health Issues Centre  
 National Rural Health Alliance  
 Paramedics Australasia  
 Public Health Association of Australia  
 Public Hospitals, Health and Medicare Alliance of Queensland  
 Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health