



Australian Health Care Reform Alliance

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Blinkered governments largely ignoring the real solutions to Australia's health

“In an era of rapidly rising health care costs, future governments need to acknowledge where the real gains in Australian’s health will lie: not in continually (and unsustainably) providing more health care but in preventing people getting sick in the first place. This will come mainly from addressing the significant factors outside the health system that have major impacts on Australian’s health outcomes and health equity and on better preventive strategies,” said AHCRA Chair Tony McBride.

What is the problem?

Social determinants of health (SDOH) are often referred to as the building blocks for health, many of which fall outside the health system. For example getting a good start in life by being nurtured as a child with healthy affordable food and a good education, living in a safe environment free from violence and racial or gender discrimination, and access to essential amenities and infrastructure like good housing, transport systems and work. Research shows clearly that these have major impacts on people’s lifelong health and wellbeing.

Although SDOH affect health outcomes they are not usually issues considered by health departments or health ministers when developing health policies or programs. By being blinkered to the real building blocks for health, we allow more people every day to become at risk of developing mental illness, cardiovascular disease and cancers. These are not issues a hospital or doctor can always fix once developed. Poverty, poor education, inadequate housing, under or un-employment (or employment where people feel they lack control and any sense of empowerment), discrimination, violence and cultural barriers, are all issues which we know have an effect on health outcomes. These issues have an effect throughout our society, with the worst affects in our most disadvantaged communities. This was recognised by an all-party Senate Inquiry last year but their tabled recommendations are neglected by the major federal parties.

What needs to be done?

“Addressing the SDOH is complex, and needs strong leadership, a coordinated whole of government approach and active community participation” said Jo Walker of the Public Health Association of Australia. “Although governments do make some

decisions with significant health impact (reducing the number of guns in our society under the Howard Government and addressing climate change under the current government), many do not. All government decisions need to include consideration of their impact on the population's health (as South Australia are starting to do)" she added. AHCRA supports the Senate Inquiry recommendation to establish a Federal government agency with responsibility for addressing social determinants of health with a mandate to coordinate this across all government portfolios.

We call upon the major parties to shift their gaze from the ambulances at the bottom of the cliff to fixing the fences at the top by considering these social determinants and acting in the long-term interests of the health of all Australians.

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