



# Australian Health Care Reform Alliance

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## **Governments need to learn the old adage that prevention is better than cure.**

The Australian Health Care Reform Alliance (AHCRA) calls on Federal and State Governments to lift their eyes perpetually from the short-term and see the value of investment in strategies which research shows will save lives, reduce illness and help prevent Australians getting sick.

“Australia should be using our world-beating expertise in disease and injury prevention where we know lives are being lost. We need to use this expertise to tackle our current key health issues in the way we did, for example, with immunisation, reducing smoking and tackling HIV/AIDS. An example of our prevention expertise has been the use of smart strategies to turn Australia’s road accident record from one of the worst in the world to now being one of the best,” said Tony McBride, Chair of AHCRA.

“Australia now saves 1,000 lives a year on our roads compared to the death rate in the 1970s. This was achieved by multiple complementary strategies that reinforced each other: seat belts, 0,05% alcohol legislation, driver education, booze buses, better road and car design, and improved trauma surgery all worked together to make us all safer on the roads. And this was achieved by many governments, police, health educators, doctors, and other bodies working together. This has brought untold benefits to thousands of families who would otherwise have faced the death or maiming of loved ones.”

Australia could now be doing the same in areas of overweight and obesity, injury prevention, mental health, alcohol misuse, oral health, food labelling and many other areas of population health.

Additionally, for governments concerned about the sustainability of the health budget, the evidence clearly shows that investment in disease prevention saves money. For example, the reduction in smoking rates delivered an estimated net benefit of \$2 billion in the 30 years between 1970 and 2000, and saved close to 17,000 deaths each year. To highlight the cost benefits of prevention, one single prevented hospital stay can save the equivalent of years of monthly GP visits.

Despite Australia’s previous successes there has been a slow retreat from investment in prevention. For the 2011–12 financial year, Australia spent only 1.7% of the total health expenditure on public health activities (prevention, protection and promotion), ranking us in the lowest third of OECD countries. By comparison New Zealand spends 7% and Canada 5.9%. To make things worse, in the 2014/15 Federal Budget, the Government walked away from the National Partnership Agreement on Preventive Health cutting \$376 million dollars from prevention over four years.

AHCRA believes Australia should be aiming for at least 5% and see it as an investment, not a cost.

AHCRA has outlined a range of short, medium and long-term strategies to create a more effective primary health care sector that can assist the overall health system to be more equitable and sustainable. These include: consideration of health impacts as a key condition of Australia signing bi- and multi-lateral trade agreements and developing a Government response to the tripartisan report from the Senate Inquiry into the social determinants of health.

