



Australian Health Care Reform Alliance

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MEDIA RELEASE

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Politicians too short-sighted about preventing disease and pain

“The Australian Health Care Reform Alliance remains deeply concerned that the direction of health care policy in Australia remains deeply focused on treating illness once established, rather than preventing ill health and creating healthy lives in the first place,” said Chair of AH CRA, Mr Tony McBride.

Whilst Australia is an acknowledged world leader in addressing tobacco control, reducing HIV/AIDS, drastically cutting motor vehicle accidents, immunisation (and is finally waking up to the issue of domestic violence), it seems to have stalled or gone backwards on equally important issues such as oral health, mental health, alcohol misuse, obesity, and health inequalities due to race, gender, socioeconomic status.

Government spending on prevention has been well less than 2% of total health spending for many years and is going further backwards since 2013. Leading experts suggest an investment of 5% is required but that it comes with longer-term benefits to Australians and the bottom line.

Further, there is inadequate action on the social determinants of health (factors outside health care which clearly impact strongly on health outcomes, eg disposable income, safe housing, education, secure employment). The tri-partisan recommendations from the Senate Committee on this in 2013 have been ignored by both major parties whilst each was in Government.

Questions that should be asked as we go to an election include

- Why are parties not investing in health prevention, given the benefits and our world leading expertise?
- Why would any party cut preventive health spending?
- Should we not aim to have preventive health spending increased from a miserable 2% up to 5% of the national health budget (still less than New Zealand and Canada)?
- Why are health impact considerations not built into all major policies?
- Why are political leaders ignoring their own members’ Senate report into the social determinants of health?
- Access to services is key to identifying and dealing with the risk factors for ill-health. Why do health policies include ongoing and increasing barriers to access?
- How much does lobbying from the food and alcohol industries control and limit preventive health measures?

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