



Australian Health Care Reform Alliance

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A 'health' policy – not just a 'health care' policy



AHCRA is disappointed in the narrow focus of the election campaign on 'health care' rather than 'health'.

Research shows that 80% of a person's length and quality of life is influenced by factors outside of the health system, including 'social determinants' such as income, education and the environment.

Yet our health policies and programs are almost exclusively focussed on

health and medical care, despite the fact that this only accounts for about 20% of overall health and life expectancy.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) has found that when people move up the socioeconomic ladder their health and life expectancy increases. This makes intuitive sense. It is impossible for people to maintain good health when they cannot afford the necessities of life, such as food, clothing and secure housing.

Therefore, AHCRA supports calls from organisations such as the Australian Council on Social Services (ACOSS) to raise the rate of the Newstart allowance to lift people out of poverty. It makes no sense to pour money into high quality health care services unless we are also doing what we can to prevent the development of illness and disability in the first place.

Part of the problem is that at a policy making and budgeting level we treat health as a separate portfolio that exists in isolation from other areas of government activity. This means that it is difficult to invest in areas such as income support, public housing and the environment on the basis of their health impacts.

This is why AHCRA supports the Social Determinants of Health alliance's suggestion that Australia follow the example of other OECD countries and consider the impacts of all policies on the long-term health and wellbeing of their population.

This would radically change the way we approach health funding decisions. For example, we know that one of the greatest threats to health is inequity so reducing inequity in all areas should be a higher priority for governments than funding hospitals.

AHCRA's vision is for an Australia where all people have equal opportunity to maximise their health and well-being. This requires moving beyond the 'health care' system to addressing all the factors that influence our quality of life and life expectancy.

29 April 2019

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