



Australian  
**HEALTH  
PROMOTION**  
Association

**AHPA's written response to the Senate  
Community Affairs Committee  
Inquiry into Concussions and repeated  
head trauma in contact sports.**

14 April 2023



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## INTRODUCTION

The Australian Health Promotion Association Ltd (AHPA®) is the peak body for health promotion in Australia. AHPA advocates for the development of healthy living, working and recreational environments for all people. Through our work we support the participation of communities and groups in decisions that affect their health.

Australia is one of the healthiest countries in the world. This is largely because of effective public health and its core services – protection, prevention and health promotion which includes action to create and support the social and environmental conditions that enable Australians to enjoy a healthy and happy life. We are now more aware than ever of just how complex the circumstances are by which human health is influenced – policies and actions shaped by the unfair distribution of wealth, power and resources, both locally and internationally. We are also more cognisant of the range of skills and practices required to enhance individual and community capacity and act to address those forces that lead to health inequities - the unfair and avoidable differences in health status seen within and between countries. **Health promotion's role has never been so significant.**

## OUR SUBMISSION

This submission has been prepared in response to an invitation to submit received by AHPA on 20 March 2023 from the Senate Community Affairs Committee.

AHPA's core focus is promoting health and preventing illness, rather than approaches responding to or treating existing disease and injury. Accordingly, this submission provides broad and principled feedback to the Inquiry consistent with aims to optimise the health and wellbeing of all Australians, rather than specific feedback relating to the treatment of concussion and repeated head trauma in contact sports. This submission addresses the following element of the Inquiry Terms of Reference: *k. any other related matters.*

## ABOUT US

Incorporated in 1990, AHPA is the only professional association specifically for people interested or involved in the practice, policy, research and study of health promotion. Our member-driven national Association represents over 1000 members and subscribers and is governed by a Board at the national level with operational branches representing all states and territories. Membership of AHPA is diverse, and includes designated health promotion practitioners, researchers and students, as well as others involved in promoting physical, mental, social, cultural and environmental health, whose primary profession or area of study may be something different, but whose responsibilities include promoting health. Members represent a broad range of sectors including health, education, welfare, environment, transport, law enforcement, town planning, housing, and politics. They are drawn from government departments and agencies, universities, non-government organisations, community-based organisations and groups, private companies, and students.

Our activities include: national registration of health promotion practitioners for the International Union for Health Promotion and Education (IUHPE) in Australia; national health promotion university learning and teaching network; early career support; national and local conferences and events; a tri-yearly Population Health Congress (with partners: Public Health Association of Australia, Australasian Epidemiological Association and Australasian Faculty of Public Health Medicine); a website providing professional and membership information; a national listserv providing members with sector news, employment, advocacy and events information; stakeholder and member communication across a range of platforms; advocacy action; strong partnership working with a range of organisations; awards; traineeships; mentoring; scholarships and bursaries; and the Health Promotion Journal of Australia.

### ***Our Vision***

A healthy, equitable Australia.

### ***Our Purpose***

Leadership, advocacy and workforce development for health promotion practice, research, evaluation and policy.

### ***Our Principles***

- Ethical practice - Supporting culturally informed, participatory, respectful, and safe practice.
- Health equity - Addressing the sociocultural, economic, political, commercial and ecological determinants of health in order to build health equity.
- Innovative and evidence informed approaches - Promoting and supporting evidence informed research, policy and practice.
- Collaboration - Working in partnership with other organisations to improve health and wellbeing.

### ***Our Strategy***

1. Promote our profession and members
2. Advocate for health promotion
3. Build professional capacity of AHPA members
4. Support career pathways in health promotion
5. Promote equity, diversity and inclusion
6. Provide responsible and sustainable governance and management

Detailed actions to achieve the strategy can be found in our [Strategic Plan](#) document.

More about our vision for a healthy, equitable Australia can be found in AHPA's [Health Promotion and Illness Prevention Policy](#).

Enclosed is our response.

Please do not hesitate to contact us with further questions.



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### **A focus on prevention.**

AHPA recommends a focus on preventing concussions and repeated head trauma in contact sports. Injuries are preventable. Health promotion and illness prevention save lives and money and delivers the best public return on investment in health<sup>1</sup>.

Injuries disproportionately affect population groups. As such, injury prevention priorities and actions should recognise those inequities and, where possible, address the underlying social and cultural determinants. AHPA notes the importance of protecting the health of at-risk and vulnerable populations including children, and population groups for which there is evidence of inequities that result in overrepresentation in concussion and repeated head trauma data.

AHPA suggests that specialist injury prevention organisations are consulted for more specific feedback relating to the treatment of concussion and repeated head trauma in contact sports, including the Australasian Injury Prevention Network (AIPN) and Injury Matters.

### **A national strategic approach.**

AHPA supports the draft [National Injury Prevention Strategy 2020-2030](#) and calls for the strategy, which underwent consultation in 2020, to be finalised and published, and to receive appropriate funding, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

AHPA supports the intentions of the draft Strategy and its recognition that the impact of injuries extends beyond data on death, hospitalisations and disability to include the social, emotional, spiritual and economic impact on communities, families and individuals. AHPA supports Objective 16 of the draft [National Injury Prevention Strategy 2020-2030](#) as provided below:

<b>Objective 16</b>	<b>Reduce the rate and impact of sports injuries</b>
<i>Actions</i>	<p>a) Support sports clubs and schools to develop, implement and enforce safety policies and practices covering education of players and parents, compulsory use of relevant protective equipment, use of relevant modified equipment and fixtures, maintenance of sporting fields, exercise-training programs, refereeing and rules for safe play, and accreditation of coaches and coaching standards.</p> <p>b) Promote head injury awareness, including concussion management and policies, particularly in contact sports and the promotion of appropriate headgear use, e.g. horse riding, skiing and other sports with standards approved headgear such as cricket and football codes.</p>
<i>Lead agency (partners)</i>	<i>State and territory departments of sport and recreation and education (Local government, peak sports bodies and sports medicine authorities, sporting associations, Education Departments, schools, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations)</i>

<sup>1</sup> Commonwealth of Australia. National Preventive Health Strategy 2021–2030. Canberra: Department of Health. 2021

AHPA notes that effective health promotion and illness prevention requires multiple complementary evidence-informed strategies. These include health promoting policies (such as strengthened legislation, regulatory, and fiscal measures), the creation of health promoting environments, community engagement and action, support to empower people to increase awareness and control over their health and ensuring person-centred health<sup>23</sup>.

A multi-sector and whole-of-system response with strong leadership and governance by governments at all levels is required. Responses must engage communities, the public, non-government organisations, universities and research institutes. The sports, private and commercial sector must also be engaged but vested interests and influence in policymaking must be made transparent and limited.

AHPA notes that multiple examples of voluntary codes of conduct/practice have shown to be insufficient in achieving widespread change, and supports the implementation of comprehensive, mandatory measures to prevent concussions and repeated head trauma.

### **Safe and inclusive participation in sports.**

AHPA supports participation in sports, including contact sports, noting the need for sports settings and environments to be safe and inclusive.

Health promotion increases physical activity in the places where Australians live, work, learn and play, and promotes safe and inclusive participation in sports.

AHPA recognises the important role that sport provide for Australians to be physically active, noting that one in four children and two-thirds of adults are above a healthy weight<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> World Health Organization. The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion. First international conference on health promotion. Available at: <https://www.who.int/teams/health-promotion/enhanced-wellbeing/first-globalconference>. WHO; 1986

<sup>3</sup> World Health Organization, SA Health. Adelaide Statement II. [http://www.who.int/social\\_determinants/SDHadelaide-statement-2017.pdf?ua=1](http://www.who.int/social_determinants/SDHadelaide-statement-2017.pdf?ua=1). 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Overweight and obesity: AIHW; 2020 [Available from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-health/overweight-and-obesity>