

Media Statement

16/04/23

Funding cuts to health promotion will impact overburdened hospitals and healthcare services for decades.

Hospitals and healthcare services play a vital role in our healthcare system – but it’s the community health promotion services that keep people out of them in the first place.

The Australian Health Promotion Association (AHPA®) believes the Andrew’s Labor Government decision to cut ten percent of health promotion funding for community health services is irresponsible and shortsighted.

While this might bring a small saving now – future generations will pay the price of poorer health and unsustainable health care expenditure.

AHPA Victoria and Tasmania Co-President, David Towl, said a cut of this scale would mean fewer services for communities.

“Community Health Promotion keeps people out of hospitals and overstretched health services. We work in schools, early childhood centres, sporting clubs, and public housing communities – which includes vulnerable people.

“Community health services are the key provider of local-level health promotion in Victoria and employ more than 500 health promotion practitioners across the stateⁱ.

“This will result in job losses and a reduction in services for those most at risk.”

Investing in health promotion is a smart strategy for Victorians. It keeps people out of hospital, reduces the burden on overstretched health services and allows people to live healthier, more productive lives. Health promotion and illness prevention saves lives and money and delivers the best public return on investment in healthⁱⁱ.

Every dollar invested in health promotion and prevention goes on to save \$14ⁱⁱⁱ.

Mr. Towl argued that the Government should increase funding for health promotion, not reduce it.

Spending on health services in Victoria is trending up in an unsustainable way, increasing by around 4% year on year^{iv}. At the same time, we have seen no changes in health promotion and prevention investment. Currently, prevention makes up about 2% of government health expenditure in Victoria.

“You don’t keep your community healthy by building more hospitals” said Mr Towl.

In the lead up to the 2022 State Election, AHPA and other peak bodies called for a commitment to spend 5% of the total health budget on health promotion and prevention. This aligns to commitments in the National Preventative Health Strategy 2021-2030 and commitments made in other jurisdictions including Western Australia^{vi}.

Australian investment in health promotion and illness prevention has progressively declined and lags comparator countriesⁱ. AHPA’s National President Dr Gemma Crawford said “Victoria has a strong history of leading health promotion in Australia – but they are at risk of being left behind in comparison to other States and Territories who seem to better understand the value health promotion offers to their people and health system.”

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“The recent and ongoing experience of the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates what happens when we don’t make long-term investments in health promotion and prevention - with a flow on effect to the public’s health and the public purse” she said.

Investing in health promotion now will realise benefits in reduced hospital admissions and improved health status in twenty years’ time.

“The Government needs to focus on the future and that takes smart and brave investment – that is not what we are seeing with these funding cuts” said Mr Towl.

“We encourage the Andrews Government to rethink this shortsighted decision and reverse the proposed cut now.”

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Contact

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

ⁱ Department of Health, 2021

ⁱⁱ [AHPA PHAA Health Promotion and Illness Prevention Policy 2021 .pdf \(healthpromotion.org.au\)](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ [Return on investment of public health interventions: a systematic review | Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health \(bmj.com\)](#)

^{iv} [Health expenditure Australia 2019-20, Data - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(aihw.gov.au\)](#)

^v [National Preventive Health Strategy 2021–2030 | Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care](#)

^{vi} [WA Sustainable Health Review. Enduring Strategies and Recommendations \(health.wa.gov.au\)](#)