
The good, the bad and the very ugly: a bleak landscape for health promotion post #Budget2014

'...The test of our progress [as a society] is not whether we add more to those who have much, it is whether we provide enough for those who have little'...

Franklin D Roosevelt – 2nd Inaugural address, January 20, 1937

The Australian Health Promotion Association expresses its disappointment in response to the Abbott Government's 2014 Budget. This Budget has delivered a heavy handed suite of cuts and changes that has severely reduced or ignored preventive health and health promotion programs and undermined Medicare, Australia's universal health insurance system. Representative government is about more than just budgets. It is about social and moral leadership that is accountable to its most vulnerable citizens, both now and with a view to future generations.

This budget apparently heralds the "end of the age of entitlement", with sweeping cuts that are likely to punish those in our community who are already struggling, leaving them doing the "heavy lifting", rather than the top end of town. In fact, the weight is placed on those who have the least income and are the most vulnerable.

Those vulnerable groups are like the canary in the mine. Their distress is the first sign of a danger that threatens all of us. And these reforms are dangerous. Moving toward a user pays system akin to the American health system puts us on a road to high costs, poor health outcomes and social disintegration. For example, the true cost of GP co-payments is certain to be much more than \$7 per visit with downstream costs in relation to hospitalisation, additional costs for pathology and medications and the cost for general practice to administer the payment.

Whilst we still have unacceptable disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous health outcomes, Australia has one of the highest levels of life expectancy in the world. This is in no small way due to the gains that have been made in public health and medicine over the last century. Public health and health promotion gains are not always quick, but they have significant individual, community and national benefits. As Professor Mike Daube noted of the budget this week, "nobody can doubt our health services and future health are the big losers. The crazy part of all this is that it's preventive programs that ultimately save the system money". In other words, supporting individuals and communities to remain well, or to intervene early to reduce the impact of health issues, has clear economic, mental, physical and social benefits for the whole nation.

Good health throughout the population is a requirement for economic and social wellbeing. Budget cuts such as the abolition of the Australian National Preventive Health Agency, National Partnership Agreements for Preventive Health (NPAPH) and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare will cost our nation's economy and population dearly. Ceasing the NPAPH for example saves the federal government a relatively tiny amount, but will reverse the significant population health gains made by the states and drive thousands more people into hospital every year. Australia's infrastructure for prevention, health promotion, including the collection and analysis of data on health care and health status has been regarded with admiration and envy by many other countries. These cuts are short sighted and perverse, and based on no scientific or informed policy evidence. Medicare Locals are to be replaced with 'Primary Health Networks' which are likely to have a largely clinical focus with little, if any mandate for prevention and health promotion.

Other decisions are equally ill-informed and retrograde. Significant cuts to dental funding means the oral health of Australians is more than ever a low priority, abolishing Health Workforce Australia, reducing Australia's voluntary contribution to the World Health Organisation, reducing our overseas aid contributions and reduced funding for programs such as Partners in Recovery will also have significant impacts on individual and community health.

Increased funding in some areas such as: bowel cancer screening, the Royal Flying Doctors Service, school sports, youth mental health, drowning prevention, youth sexual health, and funding for tobacco campaigns and plain packaging litigation is welcome. Increased funds for medical research could be positive, but will this scheme also fund public health research? What point is there in increased medical research if access to health care is curtailed? Why not act on the large body of existing evidence demonstrating that prevention and health promotion saves lives and money?

Additionally, there are a range of cuts and changes to programs such as Health Flexible Funds and Indigenous health whose true impact will take longer to determine. However, at a minimum these cuts will continue to undermine our ability to close the gap in life expectancy and health status between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and other Australians.

The Australian Health Promotion Association supports the principle of universal health care on which Medicare is based, and calls for an equitable health system underpinned by social justice principles, a well-resourced public health workforce, and a commitment to addressing the social determinants of health. We encourage members to share information with others to help them understand the real impact that the Federal Budget 2014 will have on Australia's health.

You can get involved to advocate for health promotion and the work we achieve by:

1. Going viral - If you're on social media we encourage you to start spreading the word to make sure our voices are heard. Follow #Budget2014 on Twitter and let's make sure it's always connected to #publichealth, #healthpromotion and #preventivehealth. Let's raise the profile of health promotion by connecting our tweets to @AHPA_AU (AHPA Twitter account)
2. Joining our network of advocates – Contact your local AHPA Branch
3. Send a letter to your federal MP and Senators - We have drafted one for you to use
4. Keep up to date on what is happening - visit the Conversation, Croakey and watch out for media from the various health groups that we support and see the links below

The Association's role now is to remind the people of their power and support them to raise their voices on a set of cuts and changes that are harsh, retrograde, mean-spirited and ultimately unhealthy.

Sincerely



Gemma Crawford
National President | Australian Health Promotion Association
16 May 2014

On behalf of the National Board and Branches:

Elisha McGuiness – President Queensland Branch
Denise Fry – New South Wales Branch
Cathy Malla – Vice President Northern Territory Branch
Dr Janette Young – President South Australia Branch
Jacquie Maginnis – Tasmanian Branch
David Towl – President Victorian Branch
Jamie-Lee Cavill – President Western Australian Branch



List of relevant links

Details for Members of Parliament and Senators can be found here:

http://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/Guidelines_for_Contacting_Senators_and_Members

Budget Overview

http://www.budget.gov.au/2014-15/content/bp2/html/bp2_expense-14.htm

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/budget/publishing.nsf/Content/budget2014-glance.htm>

Put the cupcake down: Cuts to preventative health funding ABC Radio National Life Matters (15 May 2014).

<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/lifematters/put-the-cupcake-down3a-cuts-to-preventative-health-funding/5453168>

ABC News – Winners and Losers of the 2014 Budget

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-05-13/budget-winners-and-losers/5433178>

Croakey Budget 2014 Focus on Health

<http://blogs.crikey.com.au/croakey/>

The Conversation

<http://theconversation.com/au/health>

PHAA

http://www.phaa.net.au/documents/140513_FINAL%20Killer%20Budget-kicking%20people%20when%20they%27re%20down.pdf

http://www.phaa.net.au/documents/140514_%20Federal%20Health%20Budget%20briefing%20for%20members.pdf

Australian Medicare Local Alliance media release

http://amlalliance.com.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0014/53411/20140513_med_budget.pdf

Australian Council of Social Service

http://www.acoss.org.au/media/release/budget_divides_the_nation_young_and_old_rich_and_poor_across

AMA

<https://ama.com.au/media/health-budget-full-pain-patients>

