

The Hon. Tony Abbott, MP
Prime Minister
PO Box 6022
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

16 May 2014

Dear Prime Minister,

The purpose of this letter is to convey to you the Australian Health Promotion Association's disappointment in response to the heavy handed retrograde 'reforms' in your Budget. Your 2014 Budget presented an opportunity to demonstrate to Australian voters your commitment to improving the health and well-being of all Australians, preventing disease and ill-health and reducing the unsustainable demand on the health care system. Instead your Budget delivered cuts that have severely reduced preventive health and health promotion programs and undermined Medicare, Australia's universal health insurance system. The sweeping cuts will punish those in our community who are already struggling to make ends meet, 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.

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, health promotion and medicine over the last century. Australia's infrastructure for prevention, health promotion and 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. The abolition of the Australian National Preventive Health Agency, National Partnership Agreements and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare will cost our nation's economy and population dearly. The replacement of Medicare Locals with 'Primary Health Networks', are likely to have a clinical focus with little, if any mandate for prevention and health promotion. Why not act on the large body of existing evidence demonstrating that prevention and health promotion saves lives and money?

Increased funding for bowel cancer screening, the Royal Flying Doctors Service, school sports, youth mental health, drowning prevention, youth sexual health and plain packaging litigation are welcome. However, overall your '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. Cutting dental funding, abolishing Health Workforce Australia, reducing Australia's voluntary contribution to the World Health Organisation and reducing our overseas aid contributions will all have significant impacts on individual and community health. 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? Additionally, the true impact of cuts and changes to programs such as Health Flexible Funds and Indigenous health will take longer to determine. At a minimum they will 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. If we are to look forward to a healthier, fairer future for all Australians we need investment in policies, people, and health promotion programs and infrastructure that builds on our success. Your Budget does not do that.

Sincerely



Gemma Crawford | President | Australian Health Promotion Association

Cc:

The Hon. Joe Hockey MP | Treasurer

The Hon. Peter Dutton MP | Minister for Health and Sport

Senator the Hon. Fiona Nash | Assistant Minister for Health