

THE 2022 FEDERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN

HEALTH AND
ECONOMIC RECOVERY



Public Health Association
AUSTRALIA

AUSTRALIA VOTES

AUSTRALIA'S HEALTH AND ECONOMIC RECOVERY

#VoteForPublicHealth



Aboriginal & Torres Strait
Islander health



Invest in
preventive health



Invest in the national
public health workforce



Establish a Centre for Disease
Control and Prevention



Protect against
unhealthy products



Climate and health



Healthy democracy and
public policy-making



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This document presents seven key focus areas, with immediate and high impact actions which should be publicly discussed as part of the 2022 federal election campaign, and be implemented by the next Australian government.

We believe public health must be front and centre to ensure our nation is equipped to prevent and control disease outbreaks, protect the health of the community, promote a resilient population, and support economic growth.¹

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to compromise health and disrupt communities and economies, and challenge governments, we are starkly reminded of the significance of good public health and health systems, and the impact of health and well-being on the prosperity of our nation, today and tomorrow.

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA), the principal non-government organisation for public health, works to promote the health and well-being of all Australians.

Key focus 1



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health

The low rates and barriers of access to COVID-19 vaccination in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community is a clear example of the significant health disparities which continue to occur in Australia.

The social determinants of health that have a direct impact to health and well-being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are a result of colonisation and associated policies.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led public health policy and service delivery result in better health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.² It is imperative that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are involved in and listened to by government, paving the way for self-determination and justice.³ This includes building and resourcing a strong and supported health workforce that has appropriate clinical and non-clinical skills to provide culturally safe and responsive health care, and targeted and universal prevention policies.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health must be central to every government policy and decision.

ACTIONS

- Invest to achieve the Closing the Gap targets
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their organisations must lead policy development and implementation



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Key focus 2



Invest in preventive health

Australia cannot afford repeated disasters on the scale of COVID-19, whether they are triggered by the next pandemic, or from the rising chronic disease epidemic.

One in five Australians have multiple chronic conditions.⁴

Chronic conditions include cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, and mental health conditions. Many of these diseases are preventable, by addressing risk factors including tobacco use, alcohol use, high blood pressure, insufficient physical activity, unhealthy diet, and overweight and obesity. They are also more likely in population groups adversely impacted by the social determinants of health.

The rise in chronic disease prevalence makes people less healthy and less prepared for future pandemics of flu and other emerging infections. The high prevalence of obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease, have been a major contributor to the increased risk of hospitalisation, intubation, and death due to COVID-19, worldwide.⁵

As a consequence of COVID-19 there has been a significant disruption to chronic disease preventative services including, [but not limited] to immunisation and screening programs, human papillomavirus vaccination, and cervical cancer screening. Prior to COVID-19, Australia was on track to be one of the first to eliminate cervical cancer.

From a national business perspective, the rise in chronic conditions is cause for concern: particularly given the relationship between poor health and diminished workplace attendance and performance. The estimated cost of absenteeism to the Australian economy is \$7 billion each year,⁶ with the cost of presenteeism⁷ estimated as being nearly five times more at \$34.1 billion in 2009-2010.⁸

Among OECD nations, Australia has one of the lowest levels of preventive health investment as a proportion of total health system spending (1.7%). The National Preventive Health Strategy 2021-2030 sets a target of that "investment in preventive health will rise to be 5% of total health expenditure across Commonwealth, state and territory governments by 2030".⁹

Funding prevention not only saves lives, it saves money; every dollar invested in evidence-based prevention programs yields a greater return on investment than treatment.

ACTION

- Increase preventive health investment to 5% of total annual health expenditure
- Establish a clear mechanism for funding allocation and reporting



Photo by Emma Simpson (Unsplash)

Key focus 3



Invest in the national public health workforce

New and existing gaps in the public health workforce have been highlighted by COVID-19.

Expertise is required across all public health disciplines, not just in the area of communicable disease prevention and management. Expertise is required in chronic disease prevention, biostatistics, epidemiology, vulnerable population, health communication, and more. A full review of public health workforce requirements is needed for an appropriately sized and adequately qualified workforce. A high quality, national, consistent, sustained and credentialed workforce development is needed. This will create increased efficiency and efficacy of public health services.

Critical to this is building a strong and supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander public health workforce, to protect and promote health, with the appropriate clinical and non-clinical skills to provide culturally safe and responsive health care.

ACTIONS

- Establish and fund a standardised national public health training program for all jurisdictions, including recruiting high quality candidates from both medical and non-medical backgrounds
- Establish nation-wide ongoing professional development credentialing programs for public health professionals
- Conduct a national review aimed at identifying additional means of increasing the size, expertise and surge capacity of the Australian public health workforce



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Key focus 4



Establish an Australian Centre for Disease Control and Prevention

COVID-19 has demonstrated that we cannot go back to the way we did things before. National surveillance and response systems were not strong or fast enough to halt or control transmission. There were major challenges in the national vaccination program roll out, quarantine procedures, best practice standards for masks, personal protective equipment and communication. This led to mistrust, misinformation, fear and frustration.

An Australian Centre for Disease Control and Prevention could operate as the central leading organisation, in partnership with existing government and non-government agencies: a “Hub and Spoke” model.¹⁰

Key functions would include:

- national coordination of disease surveillance;
- national leadership in communicable disease prevention programs;
- oversight and coordination of training and development of the disease control workforce; and
- strategic contribution to the prevention and control of chronic diseases and a reduction in the growing inequities in chronic diseases.

A new structure or agency to serve the medium- and long-term public health interests of Australia and our nearby region is needed.

ACTION

- Establish and properly resource an Australian Centre for Disease Control and Prevention



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Key focus 5



Protect against unhealthy products

Companies make substantial profits from unethical marketing and promoting unhealthy commodities, including gambling, formula milk, fast and ultra-processed foods, sugar-sweetened beverages, alcohol, and tobacco (including e-cigarettes), all of which are major causes of chronic diseases and health inequities. Children's large and growing online exposure, while bringing benefits in terms of information access and social support, also exposes them to exploitation, as well as to bullying, gambling, and grooming by criminals and sexual abusers.¹¹

To support the COVID-19 economic recovery, smarter incentives, and disincentives must be considered to raise revenue. In parallel, such fiscal policies and marketing restrictions are likely to deliver the greatest possible health impact in reducing illness, disability and premature death from chronic diseases.¹²

By introducing tax increases on tobacco (30% increase), alcohol (30% increase) and unhealthy foods and beverages (20% increase), alongside mandatory salt limits on processed foods, it has been estimated that **more than \$6 billion** of net savings could be made to the health system through a reduction in direct healthcare costs.¹³

Unethical marketing of harmful products is widespread and increasing. Australian children are exposed to severe threats from the commercial sector, by marketing that exploits their vulnerability, by governments not regulating products that harm their growth and development, and by use of their data and images without their knowledge and permission.

Industry self-regulation does not work. Regulation – with the powers only government can exercise – is required.

ACTIONS

- Government-led mandatory regulation monitored and enforced to stop unethical marketing
- Implementation of a minimum 20% health levy on sugar-sweetened beverages
- Implementation of volumetric tax across all alcohol products
- Equalisation of excise and customs duty of Roll Your Own tobacco products to equalise the tax applied to this form of tobacco with "factory made cigarettes"



Key focus 6



Climate and health

The close and delicate relationship between people and planet has been highlighted by the pandemic (and previous disease outbreaks). A true economic and social recovery from the pandemic will be one that addresses climate change.

Climate change has a direct impact on health:

- harm from heat
- air pollution
- unsafe drinking water
- loss of food security
- loss of shelter
- an increase in vector of disease propagation.

The consequences of global warming are already visible. Australia is enduring increasing catastrophic climate related events of heat waves, droughts, floods and the most recently the 2019-2020 bushfires.¹⁴ Australia's rainfall variability will increase (longer dry spells and heavier rain events), threatening water supplies and agriculture.¹⁵

ACTIONS

- Develop, implement and enforce an integrated and comprehensive suite of policies to mitigate and adapt to climate change in ways that protect and promote health
- Drive the transition from a fossil fuel-based economy through the development of renewable energy, energy efficiency and energy demand reduction



Key focus 7



Healthy democracy and public policy-making

Lobbying by commercial interests in Australia is highly coordinated and effective in influencing policy outcomes. This results in lackluster public health policy and climate change policy, a self-regulated industry and an environment conducive to corruption.

Stronger laws regarding financial donations to political parties and transparency exist at state level, but are deficient at the federal level.

Representation of industry interests should be limited to reasonable communication of evidence and issues, and entirely separated from inappropriate influences including donations to political parties.

Government advisory staff **should not be drawn** from the commercial or lobbying sectors. Transparency should be applied to all activities including ministerial and staff contacts with industry representatives.

The level of expenditure on election campaigns should be constrained to reasonable levels. Expenditure by commercial interests on third-party public influence campaigns, including concealed social media campaigns, should be subject to limits and be transparent.

ACTION

- Legislate a major overhaul of regulation and transparency relating to financial donations and lobbying influence by commercial interests



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The **2022 Federal Election Campaign** highlights seven focus areas that require attention and serious action. Addressing these areas will enable a powerful lever to drive progress towards strengthening all public health programs and progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by Australia.

The PHAA Federal Election campaign is firmly aligned with the values and key priorities of the [PHAA Strategic Plan 2021-2025](#).¹

This document is high level and is intentionally limited in scope. All PHAA policy position statements - with further references - are available from <https://www.phaa.net.au/advocacy-policy/policy-position-statements>.



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