

For immediate release
Tuesday 1 September, 2009

UNLOCKING AUSTRALIA'S HEALTH POTENTIAL

The commitment to *make good health the responsibility of all Australians* in the Preventative Health Strategy released today by Minister for Health and Ageing, Nicola Roxon, has been welcomed by the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth).

"There has never been a better time to secure significant and sustained health reforms," said VicHealth Chief Executive Officer, Todd Harper.

"The Preventative Health Strategy represents an exciting vision and our best chance in decades to deliver a healthier future for all Australians.

"We would urge the government not to delay in implementing the taskforce recommendations.

"Today, more than ever before, there is a need for good public health strategies. Our current course is unsustainable - with increasing demands on the health system and the worrying rise in chronic disease and an ageing population," Mr Harper explained.

According to Mr Harper, It's time to unlock Australia's health promotion potential.

"There is no one silver bullet to tackling the rising health burden in Australia caused by tobacco, alcohol and obesity. The multi-faceted approach proposed in the Preventative Health Strategy is crucial to reversing the tide of chronic disease in this country.

"The strategy details a raft of initiatives that support healthy choices. It's time now for action," Mr Harper said.

VicHealth strongly supports the taskforce strategy, including:

- Increasing the cost of unhealthy products, such as tobacco and alcohol. Price is one of the most effective ways to encourage people to make healthier choices. VicHealth urges the Government to direct a proportion of this revenue into health promotion activities.
- Better labelling of food, alcohol and tobacco to help consumers make more informed healthy choices.
- Protecting children from advertising of alcohol and junk food.

Obesity

- Childhood obesity will have a great impact on the future health of Australians. Ending unhealthy food and beverage marketing to children on television before 9pm as well as the use of toys and cartoon characters in promotions is important in reducing obesity.
- Introduce food labelling on front of pack and menus to support healthier food choices.

Tobacco

- Increasing the price of cigarettes. Cigarettes in Australia are less costly than they are in many other comparable countries. In September 2008 a packet of 30 cigarettes cost \$13.50 in Australia, but the equivalent price of 30 cigarettes in other English-speaking countries was around \$20 in Dublin, \$18 in London and \$16 in Toronto.
- Mandating standard plain packaging of all tobacco products, and an end to tobacco industry marketing through packaging.

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Alcohol

- Reforming alcohol pricing is one of the most effective measures that the government can take to reduce consumption. Economic studies in countries across the globe have generally found that a 10% price increase results in reducing total consumption across the population by around 5% on average. In addition, these and other studies have shown that when alcohol prices rise, problems recede, including binge drinking, motor vehicle accidents, cirrhosis mortality and violence.

VicHealth supports the creation of a National Prevention Agency to promote health and prevent illness.

“A National Prevention Agency is a key plank in the reform of our public health system. Such an agency presents a great opportunity for this country to build on the evidence of what works in health promotion and ensure improved health outcomes for all Australians,” said VicHealth’s Chief Executive.

“We know that health promotion and prevention works and is cost effective. Australia’s leadership in tobacco, road safety and HIV/AIDS prevention are proven examples of this.”

Tobacco control programs since 1971 cost \$176 million and generated estimated benefits worth \$8.4 billion - that’s a benefit/cost ratio of 50:1.

And yet health promotion is often under funded in proportion to its benefits, with just over \$250 million spent on health promotion in Australia, out of \$1.4 billion spend on all of public health.

“The Preventative Health Strategy is based on a robust process of consultation, good evidence and a keen eye on preparing for the future health needs of Australians. We all need to get behind it.”

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For further information go to:

[VicHealth](#) for more on health promotion and prevention in 2009

[Call for a National Charter for Health](#) for an Issues Paper prepared by VicHealth and the Australian Institute of Health Policy Studies

[Strategy](#) for the National Preventative Health Strategy Final Report

[A healthier future for all Australians](#) for the Final Report of the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission