

AUSTRALIAN CHRONIC DISEASE PREVENTION ALLIANCE



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Reps' inquiry must translate to real change if health system to remain sustainable

Australia's health system will be more sustainable if a new government inquiry into chronic disease prevention translates into best practice, the Australian Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance (ACDPA) said today.

ACDPA Chair, Dr Erin Lalor, said the alliance welcomed the House of Representatives inquiry into chronic disease prevention and management in primary care, provided its recommendations were evidence-based and adopted by government.

"There's been a long history of parliamentary inquiries exploring the evidence and handing down valuable reports, then no meaningful response from executive government," Dr Lalor said. "This latest inquiry is asking important questions, so we hope that the result is a thorough review of the evidence and a report that translates into best practice."

Dr Lalor said the inquiry was timely as it coincided with a new federal model for supporting general practice and a separate review of Medicare.

"We know that chronic disease prevention and management is underfunded and poorly coordinated, and that unless we invest more in prevention and early intervention, the costs of tertiary healthcare will become unaffordable," she said.

"The health system costs of treating cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, cancer and chronic kidney disease are projected to triple to over \$40 billion dollars a year within 20 years.

"Yet we are falling well short of our capacity to prevent and pick up early signs of these conditions. Improved support for primary care professionals, better targeting of Medicare rebates, enhanced use of multidisciplinary care – the inquiry will look at these key issues in relation to chronic disease prevention and management.

"So we look forward to responding – and urging government to adopt the committee's recommendations if they are consistent with the evidence."

Dr Lalor said more than 3 million Australians had high blood pressure, 4 million were obese and 3 million were smokers, while almost 40% of Australian adults had three or more modifiable risk factors.

"Successive Australian governments have looked at chronic disease prevention and management, with multiple reviews, taskforces and one-off funding packages," she said.

"While the focus of this inquiry is limited to primary care, it nonetheless has the potential to recommend long-term systemic changes. On the current trajectory, Australia won't be able to afford its chronic disease burden, unless we introduce measures now that will prevent and detect early-stage illnesses before costs blow out."

The Australian Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance (ACDPA) is an alliance of the five major non-government health organisations who work together in the primary prevention of chronic disease, with particular emphasis on the shared risk factors of poor nutrition and physical inactivity.

Australian Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance members: National Stroke Foundation; Cancer Council Australia; Diabetes Australia; Kidney Health Australia; Heart Foundation.