

AUSTRALIAN CHRONIC DISEASE PREVENTION ALLIANCE



MEDIA RELEASE

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Obesity strategy must be top priority for future health of Australians

Australia's next government must address our obesity epidemic or pay the price in higher rates of chronic disease and surging healthcare costs, according to the Australian Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance.

Releasing the Alliance's election priorities, Alliance Chair Professor Ian Olver said the obesity epidemic was one of the most critical public health challenges facing Australia today.

"Obesity is now overtaking tobacco as the largest preventable cause of disease in Australia," Professor Olver said.

"Obesity already affects nearly four million Australians and costs \$58 billion. Unless we get serious about prevention, nearly seven million Australians will be obese by 2025.

"Good initiatives are underway including federal funding for community, school and work based programs.

"However, we must do more to support these initiatives by changing our living environments to make it easier for people to eat more healthily and be more active.

"Reducing advertising and marketing of unhealthy foods to children, introducing new easy to understand front-of-pack labelling to help people make healthier food choices and reformulating processed foods to make them healthier are key priorities.

"Health and nutrition must also be a fundamental part of the National Food Plan announced today by the Gillard government, to ensure our future food supply is healthy as well as a safe and sustainable."

Professor Olver said governments and industry also needed to rethink planning for urban spaces to make it easier for people to be active.

"More open spaces for active recreation and better infrastructure to support walking, cycling and public transport use are critical, and need to be driven by a co-ordinated national strategy," he said.

Professor Olver said the priorities were in line with the National Preventative Health Taskforce's obesity strategy, which needed to be fully implemented to maximise the benefits of existing initiatives to address obesity.

"Obesity is a major cause of chronic diseases including cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, kidney disease and cancer which already account for nearly half the disease burden in Australia," he said.

"Without effective action now, future health costs will surge due to obesity-driven increases in chronic disease, while Australians' wellbeing and productivity will drop."

More information on the Alliance's election priorities is available at http://www.cancer.org.au/File/ACDPA/ACDPA_2010_election_priorities.pdf

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